

Rollerskate

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Rollerskate

by [biremus](#)

Summary

'You're a gold star fallen from its natural plane'

Remus Lupin isn't ready for university at all. As if leaving his old friends behind wasn't enough, now he has to deal with lovesick teenagers, ridiculously overambitious pranks, University Challenge tryouts, and that one gorgeous boy who just won't leave him alone...

Loosely based on Starter For Ten

Notes

Hi! 2021 Beane here. I am so happy that so many people are still reading and enjoying this fic 5 years after I wrote it!

Just adding a quick note at the beginning of the fic to let you know that as a non-binary person, I do not support or endorse the author of Harry Potter. I wrote fic back then and continue to write fic now as a celebration of the fanworks and community that I have enjoyed being a part of for over ten years now, I do not do it in any way to celebrate the creations of a bigoted transphobe. I hope you enjoy this fic (I definitely don't think it's my best work, but y'all seem to disagree), and don't forget to stan MsKingBean89

Chapter 1

It was four in the morning when Remus Lupin decided that he probably wasn't going to get any sleep. He rolled over, pulling his duvet tighter in around himself to conserve warmth, and squinted at his alarm clock, trying to figure out if there was a way to turn off the alarm without having to leave his cocoon of blankets, which there wasn't. Groaning, he reached his arm out into the cold of his empty bedroom and fumbled with the tiny glowing buttons on top of the device, cursing his anxiety for the next day. The next week. Month... *Year*.

Remus Lupin was one hundred percent *not* ready for university.

He wasn't ready for the parties and the drinking that he'd inevitably be forced into. He wasn't ready for meeting new people and getting used to a new city. Most of all he wasn't ready to come out again.

As he thought it his stomach twisted and he buried his head into his pillow. The last time had been a disaster. Being gay at an all-boys' boarding school is not the best thing, despite what people might think, and Remus had been trapped in a dormitory for the last two years of his life with five prejudiced *dickheads* who were so terrified he might have a crush on them that they went out of their way to make him miserable. It was safe to say that he was happy he'd never be seeing them again.

Despite that, he still found himself longing that it would be then he would be seeing that day, not six complete strangers that he'd only ever spoken to briefly on Facebook over the past week. He craved the familiarity, the safety of his dorm room. Moving into university halls of residence with people he barely knew sounded terrifying at that moment.

He didn't know why, though, they had all seemed perfectly nice. They had all spoken to him, apart from one boy, and none of them had seemed the type of people to judge. Lily Evans was an LGBTQ rights activist, according to her profile, and so Remus had decided that she was going to be his best friend already and James Potter seemed too interested in talking about himself to be bothered about anything Remus had to say. Remus liked that – he liked to slip under the radar.

The phone on his bedside table buzzed loudly, the screen lighting up the room so suddenly and violently that Remus had to retreat back under his duvet for a moment to get his bearings. He peeked back out and squinted down at the screen, seeing a blue notification that flashed persistently. He sighed; someone had posted in the group. At four in the morning.

He wasn't the only one awake, then.

'Sirius Black – 04:23

sorry i havent said hey ive been busy with family stuff lately. im sirius and im studying art. you all seem like cool people and i cant wait to meet you tomorrow (today, whatever)'

Remus blinked. The lack of punctuation and proper grammar was truly *painful* to the English student, and he had to resist correcting every mistake in the comment section. He decided, however, it would be best *not* to get a reputation as 'that guy', and so scrolled down to greet Sirius instead.

'Remus Lupin – 04:26 - Hi, I'm Remus. Studying English Lit. I'm guessing I'm not the only one who's nervous?'

'Sirius Black – 04:27 – nervous?? dude ive just finished marathoning miranda im not even CONSIDERING bed yet. english lit????? Yawnnn i thin id even rather do history ha!'

'Remus Lupin – 04:28 – History was my second choice of course.'

'Sirius Black – 04:29 – english and history eh? you and me are very different people'

'Remus Lupin – 04:30 – You and I.'

Remus clicked the lock button and threw his phone back down on his bedside table, rolling over to face the wall and pulling the duvet back over his head. Why was he so angry? Everyone had been so nice and now some arse had turned up and ruined it by being a cocky bastard. It wasn't as if he'd even said anything offensive, he just seemed like he was teasing Remus. He groaned.

He'd never get to sleep now.

His mother had cried when she had said goodbye, clinging to him slightly too tightly in a bone-fracturing hug. Remus had laughed, insisting that he would be fine, and that there was nothing for her to worry about, and of-course-I'll-make-lots-of-friends, and yes-I'm-fine-with-cooking-don't-send-me-lasagne.

All of this was a lie, of course, but he couldn't let his mother worry. His father eyed him knowingly, but there was an unwritten agreement between them to keep his mother in the dark about Remus' deep-seated anxieties about university life, and so nothing was mentioned. However, when Lyall Lupin pulled his son into a hug, tousling his hair despite Remus being a good four inches taller than him, he whispered hurriedly in his ear,

"Everything will be okay, call me whenever."

Remus nodded, smiling weakly at his father, before escorting them back to their car and waving them off. He had been the first to arrive in their hall, however others from the building were milling about, carrying suitcases and cardboard boxes up the staircases, and as he made his way back up to the third floor left-hand corridor (his home for the year) he made a conscious decision to smile at as many people as possible. He probably looked mad, but at least he wouldn't get a reputation as a dick.

He collapsed down onto his (new) bed, despairing at the state of his (new) mattress, its (new) springs sticking into his (old) arse uncomfortably. He knew that wouldn't be fun to sleep on. Sighing, Remus unzipped the backpack he had thrown carelessly down on the bundle of bedclothes behind him and fished out his phone, unlocking it and scrolling through his contacts.

He wanted to talk to someone but he didn't know who. He hadn't moved far from home for university, only about an hours drive, but his best friends had gone almost three times that in the opposite direction. His fingers hovered over Alice Prewett's name, longing to call her, but he knew that she too would be moving in to her halls. She'd probably already met people she liked better than Remus, and he couldn't blame her. He'd only met her and Frank Longbottom during their gap year, and he figured that you couldn't be that great friends with someone you had only known for a year. Remus locked his phone and put it back down on the uncovered mattress, dropping his head into his hands and rubbing his eyes, as he so often did when he felt like this.

"Knock knock,"

Remus' head shot up, and he physically jumped at the sound of someone else's voice penetrating the silence of the hall. A blonde girl who he recognised as Marlene McKinnon was leaning against the doorframe, her arms folded, a messenger bag hanging from one shoulder and a smile plastered on her perfectly contoured features.

"Oh," Remus stood up hastily, wiping his hands (which were unusually sweaty – gross) on his jeans before moving over to stand opposite her, "Hi, I'm Remus."

"I know, silly," She hit him lightly on the shoulder. Remus noticed her perfectly manicured nails as one hand settled on her hip, "We spoke on Facebook the other day. I'm Marlene, doing Veterinary Science?"

Remus nodded at her but then stopped when he realised he probably looked like one of those dogs people like his dad had on the dashboards of their cars, "Yeah," He cleared his throat, "Are your parents not helping you move in?" It was a stupid question, but he wasn't in the mindset for conversation at this point. His leg had started shaking.

"Yeah, they're downstairs unloading the car," She grinned, "I just wanted to see if anyone was here yet. Have you seen the kitchen? Is it nice?" Before Remus could even start an answer she was off down the hall again (Remus had chosen the room closest to the exit, to minimise the number of people he would have to speak to on his way out on a morning), leaving him with a "See you later Remus!"

Remus sighed, convinced that, again, he had managed to balls up a potential platonic relationship with his general awkwardness. Cursing himself for being so goddamn socially-inept, he turned back to his bed and began to unpack his belongings, while a niggling voice in the back of his head told him to suck it up and call Alice.

Remus had closed his door so that he could freak out in the peace of his own room, and therefore had missed the entry of the majority of the rest of his new hall-mates. He could hear them crashing about in the hall, and particularly next door, where someone was playing pop-punk obnoxiously loudly and singing along tunelessly. Having already unpacked, Remus found there was nothing to do now but sit in the worn desk chair and spin idly, taking in the surrounding of his new room.

He had put up two posters, the only ones he could bear to take down from his walls at home – one showed the members of Bombay Bicycle Club, and the other was a reproduction of an 1800s world map. His desk was perfectly organised; his mother had bought him organisers and boxes to keep all of his equipment and files ordered; and his record player was nestled in the corner. Being an English student, his shelves were filled with books, apart from the one that was stuffed with vinyl records, and all had been meticulously ordered according to the alphabet.

There was a knock at the door and Remus stood up to answer it, poking his head around to see a lanky boy – almost entirely too skinny to be legal – a few inches shorter than Remus, grinning at him from behind a pair of thick black rimmed glasses.

"Hiya, I'm James, I'm guessing you're Remus?" He held out his hand to shake and Remus took it gingerly, hoping his palms weren't too sweaty. After Remus nodded, James continued, "We're all going to order pizza and eat in the kitchen if you want to come meet everyone?" He had one of the poshest accents the Remus had ever heard, and his clothing and the way he stood told Remus straight off that he was dealing with football captain, privately schooled, 'my parents own a multi-billion pound business' James Potter, who spoke more about himself in conversation than anyone else Remus had ever met, "Just go tell Lily what you want, she's ordering. Room 306, next to

mine.” He ended on a wink, which made Remus feel immensely uncomfortable, then retreated back to his own room.

An evening in the kitchen with pizza, he could do that. How hard could it be? All he had to do was *be normal*.

Of course, that wasn’t going to happen, was it?

He gazed at his reflection in the mirror he had propped up on a bookshelf for a while, studying what he saw and trying to assess if he looked acceptable enough to be allowed to socialise with other humans. The jumper he wore was garishly patterned and two sizes too big, so he looked slightly like he was drowning, but it was cosy and smelt of home; and the skinny jeans he wore were almost a year old and were getting baggy around the knees. His face was just how it always was – average. He sighed; he may as well start the year as he meant to go on.

He slipped his phone from his desk into his pocket and set off towards the kitchen, noting how the constant noise coming from the room next door had seemed to have ceased. He turned as he left his room and walked directly into something hard. Something that smelled of leather and motor oil and wet dog.

“Watch it, mate,”

The boy was shorter than Remus by quite a way, but had much more presence. His hair was long, almost brushing his shoulders, and fell effortlessly around his eyes, which were a startling grey. He wore a worn leather biker jacket and a pair of the tightest jeans that Remus had ever seen. Not that he was looking.

“S – sorry,” Remus stuttered, not entirely sure where to look. The boy had the best cheekbones Remus had ever seen.

“No worries,” He slapped Remus on the back, and turned to walk down the hall towards the kitchen. Looking back on the taller boy over his shoulder, he asked, “You coming for pizza?”

Remus nodded, then stopped himself – dashboard dog again, dammit – and followed the boy down the hall, “Yeah, I’m Remus.”

“Ohhh,” The tone of his voice was knowing, and he laughed lightly, “The *English* student.”

“Oh shit,” The words slipped out before he could think to stop them, “Sirius.”

“You don’t sound very favourable,” He raised an eyebrow, holding the door to the kitchen open and allowing Remus through, “I was only having a laugh, you know.”

“Hmm,” Remus looked at him pointedly, and sat down at the large, round table, where most of the others had already gathered. He sat between Marlene (who was deep in conversation with another girl, who had dark hair that was twisted into a messy bun on top of her head, and spoke with her hands animatedly) and Lily, who he had only previously said the word “Hawaiian” to, but she smiled at him as he collapsed into the seat anyway.

It was typical; the hot guy in the tight trousers was an arsehole. He *was* still hot, though.

The group seemed to be congregated around a scale model of Mount Everest made entirely out of Domino’s boxes, surrounded by a moat of cans of cider. Remus noticed Sirius didn’t wait to be offered a drink, and cracked one open, taking a long drink before turning to James, who stood in the doorway,

“Ayy! Join the party!”

James gave the boy a strange look, but a smile crept over his lips and he sat down next to him, taking one of the cans of cider from the table and breaking it open.

“Everyone’s here?” Lily asked, then counted them, pointing to each person with a long, pale finger, “Great! Okay...” She picked up the lid of the first box and squinted at the contents, “Okay who wanted pepperoni?”

Marlene took the box, and the rest of the company dove at the boxes, inspecting the pizzas and distributing them properly.

“Hey Pete, you wanted a margherita?”

“Who asked for barbeque?”

“Which heathen ordered fruit on their pizza?”

Remus looked up to where Sirius sat, holding the closed box above his head like a trophy, a look of mock disgust on his handsome features. Remus sighed,

“Me,” He paused, taking the box from Sirius’ outstretched hand, noticing the leather bracelets on the boy’s arm as the sleeve of his jacket pulled back, “*thanks.*”

They sat and ate, and the conversation was dull and predictable – *what school did you go to before? Which A Levels did you take? What subject are you doing?* – Sirius did not participate, Remus noticed, and instead elected to piss about with James, throwing bits of onion from his pizza into a tub that had contained chips in the centre of the table. Mildly aware that Lily was talking next to him, Remus watched Sirius carefully; watched the way his eyes crinkled as he laughed, and the way he ran his fingers through his hair to keep it off his face, and the way that –

“What about you, Remus?” Lily turned to him, but Remus was still in his trance,

“I am *so* gay.” He said it without being able to stop himself. The words tumbled out of his mouth like pizza falling out of a box as it was knocked over by someone hastening to leave a room.

Which is how Remus ended up sat on the floor with his back pressed to his door, hiding his head in his hands and trying to pretend he was not hungry for the pizza he had just dropped all over the kitchen floor. He groaned and drew his knees up into his chest, hugging them; cursing himself for being such a stupid, anxious *twat*.

No, he would not make the mistake of dining with Sirius Black again.

Remus Lupin – 22:03 – *Alice I’m going to jump out of a window.*

Alice Prewett – 22:03 – *Dude, it can’t be that bad, I thought you said everyone seemed nice on FB?*

Remus Lupin – 22:05 – *I came out by basically drooling over my next-door neighbour in front of everyone*

Alice Prewett – 22:06 – *Ah.*

Remus Lupin – 22:07 – *I know, right? I literally said the words “I am /so/ gay” while staring at him Jesus fuck my life.*

Alice Prewett – 22:08 – *I’m sure it wasn’t that bad??*

Remus Lupin – 22:09 – *It was. It was so, so bad. I’m never leaving this room again.*

Alice Prewett – 22:10 – *Is this guy gay?? Any chance of a romance??*

Remus Lupin – 22:11 – *He doesn’t look gay. He looks... hot. Like, ‘too hot to be interested in me’ hot.*

Alice Prewett – 22:12 – *You’re blushing, I know you are.*

Remus Lupin – 22:14 – *Shut up.*

Remus managed to successfully avoid everyone in the flat for three days, waiting until they left for some fresher’s event before he left to get food or showered. He hid in his room, listening to his records and reading, occasionally mustering up the courage to text Alice, who was still pressing him to talk to Sirius, and marathoning TV shows on Netflix. All in all, the year was starting how Remus had thought it would.

On his fourth night in the building, Remus listened intently for Sirius’ music to be turned off and for the group to leave. Lily once again knocked on his door, asking if he wanted to go out with them and telling him about some deal they’d got on at a nightclub in the city, but Remus politely declined, giving the excuse of required reading. She didn’t sound like she believed him, but she wasn’t the type to force anyone into things they didn’t want to do, and so they left, leaving the coast clear for Remus to make his way down to the shared bathroom and shower.

The bathroom wasn’t really a bathroom, but a row of five shower cubicles, which Remus hated with a passion. The worst thing about Durham University was that you didn’t get to choose between en suite and shared bathroom facilities, and so Remus had been stuck sharing a shower and toilet with six other people and the constant terror of someone walking in on him peeing.

He was washing his hair when he heard the door open.

“Shit,” He muttered, then raised his voice so he could be heard through the cubicle door, “Who is it?”

“Remus!” A voice exclaimed. Oh God, it was – “It’s Sirius, obviously.” There was a hint of amusement in his voice. Remus sighed, shutting off the water and pulling back the curtain that separated the changing area from the shower. He could hear Sirius pottering about behind the cubicle door as he scooped his towel from the floor and wrapped it around his waist, and he contemplated the best way to manoeuvre the situation. He decided that leaving as quickly as possible was probably the most favourable option, and so he scooped his clothes off of the floor and unlocked the door, stepping out into the corridor where Sirius stood, seemingly waiting for him.

“Why have you been avoiding everyone?” He demanded, crossing his arms across his chest. He wasn’t wearing his leather jacket today, but was still wearing those obnoxiously tight jeans and ludicrous boots.

“Can we talk about this when I’m wearing clothes?” Remus asked, exasperated. He was very conscious of the fact his towel wasn’t secure around his waist and didn’t want to accidentally flash his hall mates during the first week. Especially not Sirius.

“You go get dressed, I’ll yell at you through your bedroom door.”

Remus sighed, but set off towards his room regardless.

“No but seriously, if you’re worried about the other night –”

“I don’t want to talk about the other night.” Remus interrupted, feeling his face grow warm as a light pink hue brushed his cheeks. His hands were shaking, he noticed.

“No one laughed at you, just FYI.”

Remus was determined not to look round at Sirius, “I don’t believe that for a second.”

“Well you should,” He heard Sirius sigh and stop in his tracks, “You dropped a sock, by the way.”

Remus stopped, the cheap carpet feeling scratchy on the soles of his feet, and bent down to pick it up, “I heard you guys laughing as I – Oh fuck.”

Remus dropped his clothes in his haste to grab his towel, which had fallen as he went to retrieve his fallen sock. Of course, he was too late, and Sirius dissolved into a fit of laughter behind him.

“Amazing,” He walked past, slapping Remus on the back as he went back to his room, “Be a bit more subtle next time you try to seduce me, Moony.”

Remus was left in a heap in the middle of the hall, groaning into the carpet and praying, harder than he ever had in his life, that that nickname didn’t stick.

“Morning, Moony,”

Remus cringed. He had thought everyone had left, but found himself alone with Sirius *again*.

“Must you call me that?” He reached up and opened his kitchen cupboard, pulling out a box of Shreddies and a cereal bowl, along with a spoon.

“Of course, Moonshine.” Sirius sidled up next to him, grinning, “Wanna hit up the poster fair after breakfast?”

Remus poured cereal into his bowl, using it as an excuse not to meet Sirius’ gaze, “Sure, why not?” He shrugged, placing the box back in the cupboard, “I’ve got nothing better to do.”

Sirius made a gasp of mock shock, clutching at his chest, “Moonface is going to leave? He’s actually going outside?”

Remus looked at him out of the corner of his eye as he took the milk out of the fridge, “I’ve decided that nothing can be more embarrassing than what happened yesterday.” That was true, Remus still felt physically sick whenever he thought about it, “Are the moon related names ever going to cease?”

“Not right now, moon emoji.”

“You just hit a new low.”

Sirius laughed – it could almost have been a bark – and threw his head back. Remus’ eyes lingered on the boy’s neck for a little too long, and his cheeks went a pale pink. Sirius didn’t seem to notice, “You’re kind of funny, you know that, Moony?”

“I’ve been told.” Remus lied, placing the milk back in the fridge and closing the door. He began eating his cereal, leaning against the sideboard and looking at Sirius, who was now sat on the table.

Sirius watched him as he ate his cereal, which was strange, and swung his legs forwards and backwards under the table. He was wearing pyjamas that seemed a few sizes too big, as they were so long they covered his feet. The shirt had a picture of a large black dog printed on it.

“James was saying he wanted to hang out with you today, just FYI,” Sirius said finally, picking idly at a loose thread on his pyjama pants. Remus looked up at him from the bowl of cereal in his hands,

“Why? So he can laugh at me?”

Sirius shook his head, “You’re not a joke to us, you know. Come on, hang out with us, it’ll be fun.”

Sirius didn’t look like he was joking, but Remus was still sceptical, “Fine, but I’m not promising I’ll enjoy myself.”

“Excellent decision, Moonlight.”

Remus Lupin – 10:34 – Alice help I’m venturing out into the Real World

Alice Prewett – 10:36 – Where you going?? Will the hot guy be there?

Remus Lupin – 10:37 – Do we have to talk about him?

Alice Prewett – 10:37 – That’s a yes then.

Remus Lupin – 10:38 – Shut up, he wants me to go to some poster fair with him.

Remus Lupin – 10:39 – AND HIS MATES before you go saying it’s a date.

Alice Prewett – 10:40 – HE WANTS YOU TO HANG OUT WITH HIS MATES AW you guys are adorable

Remus Lupin – 10:41 – I’ve literally spoken to him twice and one of those times I dropped my towel and he saw my arse

Alice Prewett – 10:42 – oh my fucking god

Remus Lupin – 10:43 – He calls me Moony now.

Alice Prewett – 10:44 – Amazing.

The student’s union building was grey and square, and possibly one of the most threatening things

Remus had seen in his life. Students were surging in and out of the doors in groups, many with bags containing rolled up posters. Remus stopped as they approached the building, daunted, and saw Sirius go on ahead, seemingly unaware of the lack of Remus at his side.

“Uh,” Remus started, reaching out and touching Sirius’ shoulder. The boy turned and looked at him, his face puzzled, “James and Peter are in there, right?”

Sirius shrugged, “Yeah, I guess.” Then turned towards Remus fully, taking a step forward. It occurred to Remus that he may look as bad as he felt, “Are you okay, mate?”

Remus cleared his throat, rubbing his face with his palm, “Yeah, I’ll be okay when I get in there, I’m just kind of –”

“Anxious?” Sirius interjected.

“Yeah.” Remus sighed, “Sorry.”

Sirius laughed and Remus’ heart sank, but the boy placed a heavy hand on his shoulder, “Dude, don’t apologise. You’re such an idiot sometimes.”

Sirius continued walking, and Remus jogged to keep up, “Wow, thanks, man.”

“I’m just saying; it’s stupid to apologise for something you can’t help.” Sirius shrugged, looking up at Remus, “if you’re terrified of people, you’re terrified of people.”

“I’m *not* terrified –” Remus was cut off by a look from Sirius, “Okay maybe a little bit.”

They began making their way down several flights of stairs. The walls were a deep purple and littered with posters advertising various fresher’s events.

“You coming to the fresher’s fair tomorrow?”

“Is that not what we’re doing today?” Remus asked, wondering how many days these ridiculous events could be dragged out for.

“No,” Sirius dragged the ‘oh’ sound out for as long as he could, “This is a poster sale you dumbass.”

“Did you just call me –”

“Shhh, we’re here.”

They turned right into a large room. The centre was lowered into the floor like a conversation pit, but about twenty times the size. The walls were, again, purple. Remus wondered if he’d ever get away from the colour. There were stalls set up in rows, presumably they would be there all week, which today held stacks of posters, as well as small knick knacks and a few second hand books. Sirius was immediately on his phone, texting James, Remus presumed. He slipped his mobile back into his jeans pocket and grabbed Remus by the hand, dragging him down the steps into the mass of people and stalls. Remus blushed.

“Come on, we’ve gotta find Prongs.”

Remus hastened to keep up with the shorter boy, who was powering through the crowd, “Who?”

“What? Oh,” Sirius dropped Remus’ hand, looking over his shoulder, “James. He stabbed himself in the nose with a fork so I call him Prongs now.”

“Amazing,” Remus said, deadpan, “At least I’m not the only one with a stupid nickname.”

“We’ll all have one by the end, just you wait!” Sirius sounded much too excited by this prospect, in Remus’ opinion.

“Hiya, mate!” And then James was there – and on top of Sirius. The two shared a hug so violent that Remus was shocked that neither fell on the floor. Apparently over the last four days the two had discovered that they were soul mates, or something.

“Prongs! Had a good morning?” Sirius was actually tousling the other boy’s hair now. Remus was amazed.

“Not really, operation Bolts fucked up.”

“Operation Bolts?” Peter Pettigrew, a short, stout boy who was studying geography reportedly because ‘he liked to colour in but was no good at art’ asked, appearing from behind the still embracing James and Sirius.

“Prongsie asked Lily out, didn’t he?” Sirius said, as if this was common knowledge. Remus hadn’t even known he had a crush.

“Oh,” Peter’s brow furrowed, “Why did you call it Operation Bolts?”

“Because Bolts is her nickname, dickweed.” Sirius tutted, releasing his grip on James’ neck and laughing at Peter.

“I really hope that doesn’t become mine.” He muttered, scratching the back of his neck and shifting uncomfortably on his feet.

“It’s better than mine, to be honest.” Remus raised his eyebrows, “He calls me Moony.”

James laughed, throwing his head back on his skinny neck so violently that Remus was sure it would snap, “I don’t even want to *know* where that came from.”

“No,” Remus admitted, his cheeks burning, “You really don’t.”

Sirius let out a bark of laughter, before throwing an arm around Remus’ shoulders and starting to walk down the isle of booths, “Come along, Moonbeam, we’re gonna get you some posters.”

Somehow the four boys ended up in Remus’ room, where Sirius was rifling through Remus’ record collection and making disapproving noises. James and Peter sat on the bed cross legged, watching the boy with matching amused looks. Remus sat in the desk chair, spinning it from side to side and trying his best to not look as uncomfortable as he felt.

“Who the fuck are Drenge?” Sirius asked, waving an LP in Remus’ general direction.

“I swear to God if you drop that I will die right here, right now,” Remus sighed, “And they’re a band, just like all the others you’ve asked about.”

Sirius shook his head, “I’m going to get you into good music this year, Moony, I promise.”

“If that means the trash you blast through the walls until 3am every night then no thanks.” Remus’ remark earned a snort of laughter from James and a sound of realisation from Peter,

“Oh my God that’s you!”

Sirius turned away from the shelf he was inspecting to look pointedly at Peter, his expression incredulous,

“Pete, how you managed to get into a top five university truly *baffles* me. Like, seriously.”

“Hey, that’s unfair.” James cut in, “You asked me if ducks could fly yesterday morning.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” Sirius pointed at James, “Those ducks outside have never once taken flight in front of me.”

James shrugged, “They’re just chill. Ducks fly, idiot.” Sirius looked offended, but James continued, “*Anyway*, onto something important – Operation Bolts. I propose a Three Year Plan.”

“That sounds vaguely Communist.” Remus smirked. Sirius groaned,

“You with your history again.” He rolled his eyes, slipping the record back onto the shelf and hopping up to sit on Remus’ desk, crossing his legs on the light wood. Sirius’ lips curled up into a sly smile when he saw Remus’ disapproving look. God, it was attractive.

“I think you enjoy it under your punk exterior.”

Sirius blew air out of his nose in lieu of a laugh, “Gotta maintain my image, Moonage Daydream.”

“What did you just call me?”

“You have Bowie records.” Sirius raised his eyebrows, “What’s this Three Year Plan then, Prongs?”

“I dunno, but I figured that it was going to take me three years to convince her to go out with me because she seemed kind of opposed to it.”

“Then why not give up if she’s not interested?” Peter asked, looking puzzled, which Remus had noticed seemed to be his default expression.

“*Because* she’s a gift from the *gods*. She’s so smart and beautiful and goddamn *radiant*.” James was gesturing to the sky as he described her, “She cares about everyone, and she’s doing a fucking *medical* degree at *Durham*. She’s a *genius*.” Remus could practically see the hearts in the boy’s eyes.

“Yeah, but you’re a scrawny arrogant prick,” Sirius said pointedly, “And you’re doing physics. Like a *nerd*.”

“He’s rich, though.” Remus pointed out, looking over at Sirius, who was silhouetted by the sunlight streaming in through the window.

“You make an excellent point, Moony.” James clicked his fingers, “I shall woo her with extravagant gifts.”

“Ah yes, the way to a woman’s heart – her purse.” Sirius said flatly.

“Is everyone calling me Moony now?” Remus moaned.

“Yes.” James and Sirius were perfectly in sync as they answered; looking at Remus as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Great.”

Remus was pulled out of his dream by a persistent knocking on his bedroom door, accompanied by a whining noise so loud the boy pulled his duvet over his head in an effort to hide from it. He was not a morning person.

The longer he lay there the less the noise sounded like a whine and the more it sounded like words. Maybe just one word. Remus poked his head out from his cocoon and squinted into the gloom, listening intently.

“Mooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooony!”

It was Sirius. Remus groaned, glancing at the alarm clock on his bedside table – it was half past seven.

“Go away.”

“But Moonlight, you promised me you’d come to the fresher’s fair.” Sirius’ voice was singsong. He sounded much too awake considering he and James had stumbled in at one in the morning.

“I will at a reasonable hour.” Remus rolled over to face the wall again, pulling his duvet back over his head.

“Mooooooooooooooooony,” Sirius cooed, “Prongs won’t wait and I want you to come with us.”

Remus sighed, sitting up. He’d be lying if he said his mood hadn’t lightened at the thought of Sirius wanting his company. He pulled the duvet around himself like a cape and padded over to the door, unlocking it and peeking around at Sirius, who grinned.

“You look delightful, Moonshine.”

“Ha ha,” Remus glared at the boy, who was eying his hair with a distinct look of amusement, “Tell Prongs I’ll be half an hour, unless he wants me to go in my pyjamas.”

Remus decided that *he* probably would prefer to go in his pyjamas, but he was bound by societal norms to change, so he shut the door after Sirius gave him a polite wave and went about trying to find something that *wasn’t* a jumper to wear. He gave up after two minutes and pulled on a green sweater, before scooping yesterday’s jeans up from the floor and changing into them.

Sirius was still waiting for him when he eventually left his bedroom, wearing his ridiculous leather jacket and a smirk on his handsome features, “Ready to go, Moondream?”

“Are you just making up words now?” Remus ran a hand through his hair, suddenly very conscious of the fact that he had neglected to comb it.

“Can’t go around repeating nicknames, can I?” Sirius shrugged, leaning back against the wall, folding his arms across his chest, “Prongs has gone off somewhere trying to chat Bolts up, so you probably have time for breakfast if you want it.”

Remus sighed, a note of faux annoyance in his voice, “So I got out of bed early for no reason at all.”

“No,” Sirius said, unfolding his arms and setting off down the hall towards the kitchen with Remus

in close pursuit, “now you get to eat breakfast with Wormtail.”

“*Who?*”

Sirius immediately burst into a fit of bark-like laughter, doubling over and slapping his thigh, “Oh my God, you weren’t there! It was amazing!”

Remus’ brow creased, “That still doesn’t tell me who it is.”

“Pete! Oh my God,” There were tears in Sirius’ eyes now. Remus suspected that the story of this nickname was going to be a huge anticlimax.

“May I ask *why*?”

“He made spaghetti and –” Sirius broke down again into peals of laughter, “No, I can’t – I can’t say it. Just trust me, it was hilarious, you really should eat dinner with us one night.”

“You’re the only one without a nickname now, Sirius.” Remus cocked an eyebrow, smirking at the boy, who had stopped laughing but was still very much red in the face.

Peter was sat at the table in the kitchen, a half eaten bowl of congealed Frosties sat in front of him as he texted frantically, his watery blue eyes focused intently on his phone screen.

“Who you talking to, Wormy?” Sirius plonked himself into the seat next to Peter, draping an arm around the boy’s shoulders as Remus set about making toast, “Got yourself a girl yet?”

“It’s mum, actually,” Pete looked up from the screen for a moment to frown at Sirius, who smiled wryly,

“Well, you know what Freud said.”

Remus snorted with laughter - “Oh my God, Sirius,” – while Peter, on the other hand, looked confused.

“I never did psychology,” His brow furrowed. This only increased Remus and Sirius’ laughter.

James reappeared as Remus took his last bite of toast a little later, looking flustered and rather red in the face.

“How’d it go, mate?” Sirius asked, pushing himself up and out of the chair next to Peter and throwing his arm around the skinnier boy with zeal. James did not look happy,

“She called me an arrogant twat.”

“Oooooohh,” Sirius screwed up his face as if he was in pain, “I take it wooing her with expensive presents didn’t work then?”

“I tried to give her the necklace but I just got a lecture on how corrupt the diamond trade is.” James shrugged, “I don’t understand women.”

“The diamond trade is incredibly damaging, to be honest.” Remus pointed out.

Sirius shushed him, “Now is not the time for social justice, Moon Warrior. *Now* is the time to collect vouchers for free cocktails, promotional t-shirts, and leaflets on STIs – onwards, comrades!”

Remus hadn't thought it was possible for the student union building to be even more crowded than it was the previous day, but that morning he found himself proved wrong. Despite it being half past eight in the morning, a throng of seemingly hundreds of students were squashed into the comparably small conference room, where the Fresher's Fair was taking place, a practically terrifying sight to Remus, who stopped dead in the doorway – causing a minor pile up behind him.

He felt a hand on his arm, gripping him reassuringly for a moment before letting go, "Alright, Moony?"

Remus looked down at Sirius and gave him a weak smile before continuing into the room after James and Peter, who did not seem to have noticed the other boys stop.

Sirius seemed to be looking for something specific; his shaggy head whipping from side to side to read the signs presented proudly on each stall as the two of them waded through the crowds. When they eventually caught back up to James, Sirius nudged him with an elbow, "'You seen it yet?"

"Not yet, mate, keep your eye out, though." James slipped his hands into his pockets, glancing to his right to read another banner, shaking his head, "There's got to be a football team we can join."

Sirius turned to face Remus quickly, a grin on his handsome features, "Hey, Moon face, do you play?" Remus laughed,

"Only with a gun pointed at my head."

Sirius huffed – "You're no fun" – before resuming his search, his head moving as if he were an overenthusiastic tennis umpire.

Peter dragged the four of them over to a stall for 'The Doctor Who Society', and began talking animatedly to the leader of the club while Sirius sighed loudly at periodic intervals.

"Why are we friends with such a *massive nerd*?"

James hit him lightly on the arm, "You were asking me if they had a comic book society earlier." He gave Sirius a disapproving look, which was returned with equal zeal,

"You know that's different."

"Excuse me?" The three boys turned to see that they had been leaning against a stand for the Journalism Society, behind which stood a blond student with a pinched face and an emerald green dress, who glared at them reproachfully, "If you're not interested in the Journalism Society could you *try not* to sit on my example articles? That would be great, thank you."

"Nah, we're not interested in writing for some magazine," Sirius winked at the girl, who frowned at him, "We all know I'm front page material."

James let out a snort of laughter, and grabbed Sirius' arm to pull him away from the girl, who was beginning to look murderous.

"Come on, Pete," Sirius threw an arm around the boy and began dragging him away from the Doctor Who stall, but not before Peter had scrawled his name down in blue Sharpie and waved goodbye to the stallholder.

The foursome wandered down several more aisles, still not finding any clubs or societies that

interested them, but laughing about the encounter they had just had. Eventually James stopped in the middle of the group of bustling students, tapping Sirius' arm with a distant, shining look in his eyes.

"Prongs, you found it!"

Remus and Peter watched on, nonplussed, as Sirius and James hugged furiously, almost on the verge of tears. Remus cleared his throat,

"Are you going to sign up for the football team, or are you just going to cry about the prospect of it?"

Half an hour later, the four boys were *still* huddled by the football team's stand, Sirius and James in deep discussion with the captain, who seemingly wanted to know every single detail of his new recruits' playing histories. Peter and Remus hung back slightly, the latter leaning against the edge of the adjacent stall, watching Sirius as he gesticulated enthusiastically, smirking at his excitement. He felt someone tap on his shoulder briskly, and turned to see a student in a powder blue button down shirt, holding a green folder and eyeing Remus with concern,

"Would you mind not sitting there; I'm trying to set out the signup sheets."

"Oh, sorry, I didn't realise, I was just –" Remus tailed off, realising the boy was only half listening, but backed away slightly, so that he could read the banner that adorned the booth: '*UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE TEAM TRYOUTS*', "Is that *University Challenge* as in the TV show?"

The boy behind the stall brushed his golden-blond hair out of his eyes exasperatedly, "Yes, of course," He placed his folder down on the table and held out a hand to Remus, "Gilderoy Lockhart, reading Renaissance Art History; I took last year's team to the final – would have won it, too, if Edinburgh hadn't been dirty cheaters, haha!" His laugh was false, but his smile dazzling. Remus thought his teeth were entirely too white to be real.

Remus shook his hand, "Remus Lupin, I'm reading English Literature."

"Good, good!" Lockhart gripped Remus' hand a little tighter and leant towards him, "How's your general knowledge?"

"Oh no, I'm not here to –" Remus began to protest, pulling his hand from Gilderoy's grip, but found himself interrupted by Sirius, who appeared almost instantly at his shoulder,

"You're signing up for *University Challenge*!" His grin spread from ear to ear as he reached for the pen that was taped to a clipboard on the table.

"No, no I –" Remus was interrupted again,

"There, I've put your name down as well – we can test each other!" Sirius winked at Remus, who felt a blush arise on his cheeks, but his grin dropped as he saw the look on Remus' face, "What's wrong?"

Remus looked from Sirius' perfect cursive on the signup sheet to Gilderoy Lockhart's eager face, up to Sirius' eyes, which shone with hope. He couldn't say no now.

"Nothing," He sighed, "Absolutely nothing at all."

Chapter 2

“‘*We must leave exactly on time - From now on, everything must function to perfection.*’ Whose words were these, spoken to a station-master and quoted in 1939, part of the mythology that the trains always ran on time under Fascist dictatorships?”

Sirius groaned, his hands moving up to grip his hair, squeezing his eyes shut as if this would, in any way, help him to make up an answer to the question that Remus had just asked him. The latter was well aware that his companion would have no clue as to the answer, but he delighted in seeing Sirius’ pain.

“I dunno,” Sirius waved his arms in the air as if trying to grasp a dictator’s name from a cloud above them, “Lenin?”

“*Lenin?*” Remus laughed, his face glowing by the light of his laptop screen in the dim half-light of his room. Over the past week he had grown closer to Sirius than he expected he would, especially in the aftermath of the pizza and towel incidents, but as the *University Challenge* tryouts grew closer, he found the offensively handsome boy sprawled on his bed more often than he might have liked – especially seeing as term had started, and he had reading to do.

“I told you I *don’t like history*.” Sirius kicked in Remus’ general direction half-heartedly, missing miserably but not caring, “If any questions like that come up I’ll just give them to you.” He waved a hand dismissively, looking over at Remus as if this was obvious.

Remus tutted at the boy, who had lain back again, waving his feet in the air for a moment before leaning them against the wall, his head hanging off of the side of the bed, hair almost brushing the carpet, “The tryouts are a quiz sheet? You have to answer as many as you can *alone*.” Remus picked up his laptop from his lap and placed it on the bed next to him, stretching out his legs and resting his feet on Sirius’ stomach, “It was Mussolini, by the way.”

Sirius’ head popped up for a moment as he looked up at Remus incredulously, “How did you know that? Do you know everything?”

Remus laughed, before leaning back against his pillows, crossing his arms behind his head, “The website had answers as well as questions, dummy.” He paused, “Hey, maybe that could be your nickname – it suits you.”

“No way!” there was genuine pain in Sirius’ voice as he even considered the idea, “There’s not enough pizzazz! You know I need a masterpiece of a nickname – something unchallenged; something truly amazing. You know, like the Dirty Dancing of nicknames.”

Remus laughed so loudly and so suddenly that he snorted (which was horrific and possibly the most embarrassing thing ever, but now was not the time to dwell on that), propping himself up on his elbows so he could see Sirius’ face, “*Dirty Dancing?*”

“A true masterpiece. James agrees, ask him tomorrow.”

Remus glanced at the alarm clock by his bed quickly - it was half past one in the morning. He pulled his legs back into himself quickly, sitting up and rushing to turn off his laptop, “I have a lesson in seven hours; you have to go because I need sleep.”

Sirius sighed, deep and dramatic, “Fine,” He elongated the ‘I’ sound for as long as he could, repositioning himself so that he was sat upright on Remus’ bed, “But it was your own fault for

picking a course that had lectures in the morning.”

Remus found himself smirking as he watched Sirius stand up and stretch, his shirt pulling up and showing a little of his stomach in a way that seemed too cliché to have not been deliberate, “They don’t tell you when your lectures are going to be, or else I would most definitely not be out of bed before ten o’clock any day of the week.”

Sirius waved a hand at Remus in an offhand way, heading towards the door, “Shush, Moon River, I’m sleepy, I don’t know what I’m saying.”

He left, and as Remus heard the soft thud of the door closing behind him a soft blush rose in his cheeks, though he wasn’t sure why.

“Night, Moony.” He heard Sirius shout through the wall.

Remus smiled to himself and whispered, “Goodnight, Sirius.”

“Good morning, star shine.” Remus smirked at Sirius, who was dragging himself towards the kitchen in his pyjamas as Remus got back in from his lectures in the early hours of the afternoon. The boy looked around at him, squinting up through messy black hair, and shook his head,

“So, you figured it out.” He sounded disappointed, but that may have just been tiredness.

“The moon and the stars, how poetic,” Remus mused; relishing the scowl on Sirius’ handsome face (was he pouting? Of course he was), “Shakespeare couldn’t have come up with it.”

Sirius waved a hand in Remus’ general direction, turning back and continuing his snail-like travels to the kitchen, “Fuck off with your English shit,” he pushed open the door to the kitchen and looked back at Remus, as if to invite him, “or at least wait until I’ve had coffee.”

Remus followed Sirius into the kitchen, where their seventh hall-mate Dorcas sat, flicking through a fabric catalogue and twirling noodles around a fork. She looked up to greet them, smirking at Remus,

“Hey, Moonboy; how gay ‘you feeling today?’”

Remus raised his eyebrows at the girl, whose dark eyes glistened playfully, “Probably not as gay as you and Marls.”

Sirius gave a bark of laughter behind him, and Remus smiled – making Sirius laugh always gave him a feeling of triumph.

“That is one hundred percent true,” Dorcas said matter-of-factly, turning a page in her fabric catalogue, “and there you were worrying you’d be the only queer in halls; we almost outnumber the straights.”

“I thought we did?” Sirius asked loudly over the sound of the boiling kettle, and Remus’ stomach twisted.

“You’re gay?”

Sirius shrugged, “Pan; whatever.” He turned back to the kettle to pour boiling water into a mug, which Remus was grateful for given how red his face had just become. Dorcas laughed, before

going back to her book and noodles, a smile playing on her lips.

Remus felt like he might just keel over there and then. Sirius was officially Not Straight. This was too much for him to process – there was an actual possibility of Remus getting to date Sirius; it was possible that one day he could run his hands through the boy's hair; he could actually get to *kiss* him.

And with that thought, Remus Lupin ran away.

Remus Lupin – 13:57 – EMERGENCY OH GOD PLEASE HELP

Alice Prewett – 13:59 – Jesus, Moon Moon, what's up?

Remus Lupin – 14:00 – WHY DOES EVERYONE KEEP CALLING ME THAT??? AND HELP ME ALICE SIRIUS IS OFFICIALLY QUEER AS HELL

Alice Prewett – 14:01 – CONGRATULATIONS you actually had a crush on a queer boy for once I'm proud

Remus Lupin – 14:01 – You're not helping, Al, what do I do

Alice Prewett – 14:03 – Calm, Moony, everything will be alright. You're gay af, he's gay af. I can't see this going wrong

Remus Lupin – 14:04 – Dude just because he's queer doesn't mean he'll fancy me. That's not how being gay works.

Alice Prewett – 14:05 – He spends 90% of his time on your bed I think maybe he does have a crush on you.

Remus Lupin – 14:06 – I h9 U

Alice Prewett – 14:06 – Luv U 2

“Oi, Moony!” The sudden banging on Remus' door startled him so thoroughly that he dropped the book he was reading down onto his face, and he became very glad that Waterstones had sold out of hardback copies of *Frankenstein* before he had gotten there. He sat up from where he had been lying on his bed, rubbing the sore spot on his forehead where the edge of the spine had hit him, and made his way to the door, which James was still thundering his fists upon, “Moooooony!”

Remus flicked the lock on the door open and watched as James stumbled through the doorway, his limbs flailing as he tripped like a baby giraffe. He coughed loudly as he straightened himself up, his hand ruffling his hair nonchalantly. Remus laughed at him, and he blushed,

“Hey, man,” He paused, his brow furrowing, “Why's your face all red?”

Remus' hands went to his fringe, flattening it over his forehead so that the small bump that had begun to appear was hidden from view, “Doesn't matter,” He cleared his throat, leaning back against the wardrobe behind him, “What did you want, Prongs?”

“Oh, yeah!” James grinned, “I have an exciting opportunity for you, Moony.” His eyes glistened

with promise, and he leaned closer to Remus in a way that made the boy only slightly uncomfortable. Remus remained silent, so James took this as an invitation to continue, “The boys and I are going to pull –” He took what Remus was sure was a well rehearsed pause for dramatic effect, “- a *prank*.”

Remus sighed, he thought the days of immature boys pulling immature pranks were over when he had left boarding school, but apparently they weren’t. James was still grinning at him, his face barely ten centimetres from Remus’.

“No.” Remus said simply, blinking. The grin didn’t drop from James’ face,

“That’s what Pete said as well, but we managed to change his mind.”

Remus sighed again, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose, “Do I even need to ask who ‘we’ is?”

As if he had been waiting for a cue line, Sirius bounded through the door, practically leaping at Remus and landing with his arms firmly around the boy’s middle. Remus tried very hard not to blush (he was a miserable failure, and he knew it), and pushed Sirius off of him. He was starting to feel claustrophobic, cramped in the doorway of his room, trapped between the wardrobe and the two boys - despite his advantage in height, Remus still felt they had a much greater presence than he did, and he found them rather intimidating – and so he broke away from the group and perched on the edge of his bed.

“Mooooony,” Sirius was pouting again, and hopped up onto Remus’ mattress behind him, resting his chin on Remus’ shoulder, “Please, it’ll be no fun without you.”

Remus’ stomach twisted. No one had ever said that to him before – he’d never had such close friends before. He didn’t want to let them down, but he also didn’t want to get kicked off campus for getting involved in stupid pranks that would probably be against at least forty rules, knowing Sirius. He considered it for a few moments as Sirius nuzzled into his neck, his warm breath and long hair tickling his skin in a way that made him aware of every slight movement he made. He couldn’t deny that boy anything, and he knew it.

“Fine, I’ll help you *plan*,” He felt Sirius retract his head from Remus’ shoulder, and his heart sank a little, “I refuse to become a field agent.”

“You can be our coordinator,” James was still grinning his huge, brilliantly whitened grin, “I’ll fetch the Map.”

He had fled from the room before Remus had a chance to ask him what ‘the Map’ was, leaving Sirius and Remus alone for the first time since Sirius’ reveal the previous day.

“Oh, man, the Map is rad,” Sirius moved over from the bed into the desk chair opposite, his ridiculous boots planted firmly on the floor as he swung his body from side to side, gripping the arms as if he was on a rollercoaster, as opposed to a plastic office chair, “He got it at the fresher’s fair.”

Remus’ brow furrowed, and he looked at Sirius with an odd expression, “So it’s just a campus map? I have one of those; he didn’t have to go get one from his room.”

Sirius gasped as if he had been mortally wounded, grasping his chest, “*Just a campus map?* How *dare* you. This is the Map you’re talking about!” He leant towards Remus, resting his elbows on his knees, bringing his hands together, “Me and James have been adding to it – first it was just

doors that aren't usually locked, then some windows that you can jimmy open if you try hard enough; then we started finding short cuts and hiding spots. It's the lowly prankster's best friend!"

Remus narrowed his eyes, "I'm pretty sure some illegal stuff has been happening, but alright, I'll go with it."

James burst back through the door a moment later, tripping over his gangly legs slightly and stumbling, before straightening himself up as Peter followed him in at what was, in comparison, a leisurely stroll. The former was holding a scraggly white sheet of paper aloft, as if he had been given a trophy or a certificate, and lowered it into Remus' hand like it was some sort of offering.

"Behold," He said, his voice radiating grandeur, "The Map."

Remus unfolded the paper in his hands unceremoniously, and squinted down at the brightly coloured map of the campus, which had been sparsely covered in drawings and writing depicting various foliage labelled things like 'Hiding Spot No. 394', and arrows pointing to seemingly solid walls labelled 'Gap Just About Big Enough For Sirius To Squeeze His Arse Through'. Remus flipped over the paper to see a list of names that he didn't recognise, followed by sets of numbers which seemed to correspond to buildings, rooms and times. He directed his gaze back to James, who was watching him with an expectant look in his shiny eyes,

"Well?" The boy asked, his glasses slightly skewed on his nose.

Remus was speechless for a moment as he folded the Map back up into his hands, "This is amazing," He admitted, holding it out for James to take back, "I want no part in it."

James sighed loudly, snatching the paper from Remus' outstretched hand, and Peter seemed to deflate slightly. Sirius slapped his hands down on his thighs, "Come on, you've got to! You're part of the team now, Serious Moonlight."

Remus glared at him, "If you don't stop with the Bowie references soon I swear I will –"

"Dude, you *have* to be in, we've got the brawn," James gestured to himself, "The looks, and the spare," He pointed to Sirius and Peter in turn, "We need the brains; otherwise we'll never succeed in our mission."

Remus smiled, and felt his stomach flip. They *needed* him. *Him*.

"Okay, fine, I'm in."

Remus found himself in Sirius' room for the first time the following night, sat by the pillows of his bed with his legs tucked under the duvet to keep warm, leaning against the wall and watching as Sirius scanned a webpage for more questions to quiz Remus with. The boy's room was darker than Remus', due to Sirius hanging a flag with a band logo in front of the window, and the walls were plastered with posters and photographs of bands, as well as him and his friends from before university. The desk against the window was cluttered and dirty, with screwed up paper overflowing from a basket that seemed to have become a bin, and an easel set up with a piece of cartridge paper that was covered with nothing but scribbles. Pencils and paintbrushes had been stored in an empty bottle that seemed to have contained alcohol at some point, and the shelves that Remus had filled with books and records in his own room were in here filled with bottles of paints and other art supplies. Remus liked it; it felt more like a home than his room, which had still maintained some of its clinical whiteness.

“Sao Vincente, Boa Vista and Santiago are among the islands of which republic? It gained its independence from Portugal in 1975, has a population of around half a million, and is situated around 600 kilometres from the coast of West Africa.” Sirius read carefully, only glancing up at Remus after he had finished the final word, looking at him with a look of triumph, as if he knew that he wouldn’t be able to answer the question.

Remus smirked at him, “Cape Verde,” He said, shrugging, “I don’t have a world map on my wall for nothing, you know.”

Sirius’ eyebrows shot up, “We should get you on *Pointless*, not *Uni Chal*.” He handed the laptop to Remus, who flicked back to Google to try and find some questions they hadn’t asked each other yet, and then stretched out so his feet were propped up on his office chair, devoid of his stupid boots but instead wearing two garish socks that seemed to have come from different pairs, “At least we could win some cash on *Pointless*, I’m broke.”

Remus looked up at the boy, squinting slightly as the brightness of the screen lingered on his eyes, “I thought you came from a rich family? That’s what Prongs said anyway.”

Sirius became visibly uncomfortable, drawing his knees into his chest, retracting his feet from the chair. Remus knew instantly that he had mentioned something he shouldn’t have, and his stomach twisted. What if he had ruined his friendship with Sirius? What if he wouldn’t trust him again? Remus thought he might be sick.

“They don’t send me any money,” Sirius’s gaze moved away from Remus down to look at his lap, his arms snaking around his legs and hugging his knees, “Or anything else for that matter.”

Remus’ brow furrowed. Sirius looked so upset, but also frustrated – more at himself than anything else. Remus didn’t want to ask any more questions, and so remained silent. Sirius seemed to take this as an invitation to continue.

“I don’t mean they don’t send me presents or anything, you know, I’m talking *texts*. They don’t even send me a fucking text every now and again to let me know they’re not dead! It’s not as if I murdered anyone, I don’t –” He broke off, looking up at Remus again, “You don’t want to hear this, I’m sorry.”

Remus shook his head quickly, leaning towards the boy who looked so small and fragile. He considered placing a hand on his shoulder, but he wasn’t sure if he was ready to actually *touch* Sirius yet, no matter what the context, and so only tried to offer words of comfort, “No, no, it’s okay. Dude, you don’t have to say anything but you know –” Remus’ voice faltered for a second, but he cleared his throat and carried on, “You know you can tell me anything, that’s what friends are for, right?” He cringed internally at how cliché what he had said sounded. In his head it had been just the right thing, but now the words hung in the air like some kind of sticky, heavy fog, almost drowning him. He felt his face grow red, but didn’t move away from Sirius, who was looking down at his knees again.

There was silence for a few moments as Sirius appeared to be trying to compose himself, though Remus couldn’t be sure as his face was partially covered by his dark hair, which framed his face like a dark curtain. When Sirius spoke, it was quiet, as if people in the other rooms were listening in, “My parents wanted me to go to Oxford – Queen’s College – it’s a family tradition. They wanted me to study history, like my dad, but I wanted to do art. Can you imagine that? The son of Walburga and Orion Black: a penniless artist!” He spoke with faux shock in his voice, a bitter expression on his face, “We were arguing for months, and it finally looked like I was going to win when my brother finally grew a backbone and stood up for me, but then I –” He stopped suddenly, looking up at Remus for a moment before looking down again, “Then something happened that

tipped mum over the edge. She kicked me out – cut me off from the family account, refused to contact me – I even heard she had my name taken off of the family tree that they have in the entrance hall; or that’s what Reg told me, before mum cut him off from me too.”

Remus was momentarily distracted by the fact that wherever Sirius had lived had an *entrance hall*, and was the sort of family that proudly displayed their family tree so that people could marvel at their ancestry, but quickly brought himself back to the matter at hand. Sirius had been disowned for studying *art*? What kind of fucked up family was he from?

Sirius looked up at Remus again, shifting so that he was sat cross legged and his body faced his companion. He looked less uncomfortable, but still vulnerable. Remus supposed you must if you trusted someone enough to tell them something like that. He wouldn’t know, he’d never told anyone about how he felt before.

“Reg is my brother.” Sirius explained, picking at the skin around his thumb on his left hand, “Or he *was*, I guess.” He shrugged, and then smiled, “Anyway; go on, quiz me.”

Remus looked back down at the laptop screen, but not before noticing the stream of dark red that had begun dripping down the edge of Sirius’ thumb.

It was lunchtime when Remus returned from his morning lecture the next day, and the kitchen was a hub of activity. He was greeted by the stench of fried chicken flavoured Super Noodles, which, he found without much difficulty, belonged to James, who was perched up on top of the counter next to the sink. Peter was sat at the table with Sirius, where the two of them were eating Dairylea cheese triangles out of the box and looking intently at the Map, though none of them said a word until Remus announced his presence by clearing his throat.

“Shh, Moon Moon,” Sirius shushed him, his voice barely a whisper, “We’re thinking.”

Remus rolled his eyes, moving over to the fridge and taking out the cold pizza he had stored in there the previous night, noting that there were now only two pieces instead of three. He pulled out a chair at the table and sat down, taking a bite of his lunch before joining his friends in staring at the Map.

“So, what are we thinking about?” He said, still chewing loudly. Sirius looked at him incredulously, as if he was offended at the very idea of Remus speaking. James, however, hopped down from the counter and pulled up a chair, placing his bowl of noodles down and smirking as Sirius pulled his shirtsleeve up and shielded his nose,

“The prank,” James said simply, “We’re planning for tonight, but we’re not sure how to get in.”

Remus sighed, placing his slice of pizza back on the plate, “You never actually told me what we’re doing.”

Sirius shushed him again, his face sinking onto the wood of the table, his face barely centimetres away from the paper. Peter obliged Remus, taking a drink of Diet Coke before answering, “The chemistry kids are having a party at the Union tonight and James has some sort of rivalry with one of them, I’m not sure why, but he wants to prank them, so we bought 300 rubber beetles off of Amazon and we’re going to replace the confetti with them.”

Remus blinked, and then decided he must have heard him wrong, because these kinds of things didn’t happen in real life, “I’m sorry?”

Sirius sighed loudly, pushing himself up so that he was sat straight again, looking at Remus like he was just a tiny bit stupid, “We’re going to make it rain gross bugs, Moony, it’s not that hard.” His voice was bitter, which took Remus aback, and he felt his heart sink a little.

“It seems as though you’ve got it all figured out,” Remus commented carefully, watching Sirius out of the corner of his eye, “So what are you all ‘thinking’ about?” He stressed the word, raising his eyebrows at James, who reached into the centre of the table to pull the map towards him and Remus.

“Okay, so we know how to get into the confetti canons and we know how to get to them *inside* but _”

“But you don’t know how to get in the Union without being caught?” Remus finished, and James nodded enthusiastically. Remus bit his lip, then took the Map from James, “Give me a minute...” He squinted at the purple square that represented the Students’ Union, reading the annotations in James’ careful print. ‘*Front door – manned 9:00 – 22:00 daily*’, ‘*Service hatch – locked – only key owned by caretaker (Filch)*’, ‘*Back door – usually locked*’, “There – the back door,” He pointed it out on the map, placing it back in the centre of the table so that he could show Peter and Sirius as well, “It won’t be locked if they’re having a party – the smoking shelter is right outside.”

James took hold of Remus by the shoulders, grinning at him, “Moony, I could kiss you! In fact,” He leant in and placed a kiss on Remus’ forehead (Remus did *not* blush – or so he would insist to the others later), “You’re a genius; a proper genius! Mate, I think I love you.”

Remus raised his eyebrows, “Don’t tell Lily, will you? I’m not sure she’ll be impressed.”

He heard a familiar bark of laughter from behind him at the table and felt a smile creep onto his lips. Hopefully, everything would be going back to normal.

Alice Prewett – 14:36 – *So, how are things with lover boy?*

Remus Lupin – 14:38 – *Please don’t call him that, Al. And actually they’re a bit weird? He told me something last night I don’t think he’s told anyone else, not even James*

Alice Prewett – 14:39 – *Isn’t that a good sign? You know, a sign that he trusts you?*

Remus Lupin – 14:41 – *IDK man, he was acting really strange today? Like I’d done something wrong?*

Remus Lupin – 14:42 – *Like he kept shutting me down whenever I said anything telling me to be quiet? IDK*

Alice Prewett – 14:44 – *He might just feel weird about telling someone. If he’s never told anyone before he probably feels like he’s betrayed himself, y’know? Like he’s made himself vulnerable?*

Remus Lupin – 14:45 – *Yeah, I get what you mean. I just wish that he’d never told me, I’m terrible with other people’s feelings.*

Alice Prewett – 14:46 – *Dude, you don’t have to tell me that.*

“Are you sure we can’t convince you to come with us?” Peter was sat on James’ bed, underneath a large red Arsenal flag which adorned the wall behind him, and spoke to Remus with some form of pleading in his voice.

Remus shook his head, holding his hands up, “I have reading to do, and anyway, you wouldn’t want me panicking and holding you up,” He paused, looking pointedly at Sirius, “And I can’t go out tonight, the *University Challenge* tryouts are tomorrow and I have to get an early night.”

Sirius pulled a face, “Sleep is for the weak.”

“I don’t think trivia warrants a lot of strength.”

Sirius stuck his tongue out in response to Remus, who smirked at the boy before hopping up to sit on James’ desk, which was littered with graph paper and open textbooks. James was leaning against his wardrobe, dressed head to toe in black, idly playing with the blue tack on the back of a *Breaking Bad* poster, which was half hanging off of the wood beside him. His room was exactly how Remus had imagined it – more posters of sports teams and TV shows than any actual work. In fact, Remus was sat on the only work visible in his entire room, which probably wasn’t good, but James hadn’t said anything so Remus didn’t move.

“Anyway, men,” James said with vigour, stepping into the centre of the room and clapping his hands together, “The time is now. Snivellus won’t know what’s hit him.”

Sirius laughed, and hopped up from the office chair to high five James, but Remus cleared his throat, “Who?”

“Severus Snape,” James answered, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, “That sneaky, greasy git who keeps hanging around with Bolts.”

Remus raised his eyebrows, “Ah, I should have known it was something to do with her,” He picked up James’ calculator from the desk next to him and began fiddling with it to keep his hands busy, because otherwise they probably would have started shaking; he hated speaking against his friends, “You know she’d probably, uh, appreciate you more if you didn’t,” He faltered slightly, his finger slipping on one of the buttons and causing him to drop the device, “If you didn’t harass her friends? I dunno, though, sorry, I’ll shut up.” He reached down to pick up the calculator from the floor, and could feel his heart pounding in his chest.

Why had he spoken? Why had he done that? He was such an idiot – such a stupid fucking *imbecile* – they were all going to hate him, and then he’d be back where he was before, with no friends and miles away from home.

He had to take three long, deep breaths before he straightened himself up.

James was looking at him as if he had just slapped him across the face, but Sirius showed a look of concern. Peter seemed to be nodding, which made Remus’ stomach settle slightly.

“Snape isn’t her friend, he’s a gross hanger-on! He’s a,” James stopped, his arms flailing in front of him like he was searching for the words in the air, “*limpet*, he’s a limpet. A barnacle. He’s known her all her life and he even followed her here! He needs to learn to back off.”

Peter narrowed his eyes, “Did Bolts tell you this,” He spoke carefully, as if he didn’t want to offend James any more than he had been already, “Or did you just decide it yourself?”

James began stumbling over his words, “Well, she didn’t *exactly* – I mean, she’s –” He broke off, looking at Sirius with a pleading look, who sighed, and placed a hand on James’ shoulder,

“He deserves everything he gets, Prongs, don’t worry.”

James nodded once, the grin spreading over his features again, “Excellent,” he turned back to face Peter, now addressing the whole group, “Alright, men, let’s do this.” He led the way from the room with Pete in pursuit, but Sirius hung back for a moment,

“You alright, mate?” He didn’t move any closer to Remus, only addressed him from across the room, his voice low so that the others didn’t hear him. Remus managed a weak smile and a nod before James poked his head back around the door,

“Moony, I have to lock my room before we go, y’know.”

“Oh, right,” He slid down from the desk, his legs feeling unsteady but stable enough as he made his way towards the door, passing Sirius as he went, who was watching him with an odd look in his eye, “I’ll see you guys later, then, I guess.”

The two boys passed him in the hall, and Sirius placed a hand on his back softly, “Text me if you need me to come back, Moon Dreamer.”

Remus felt like he was going to vomit.

“You’re okay now though, right? I mean, you’re not dissociating or anything?”

Remus was starting to regret telling Alice about his slight anxiety episode in James’ room because she had insisted that she Skype him immediately to make sure he was alright. She was squinting at him through the laptop screen, and speaking to him as if she was his mother,

“Go and make some tea, I’ll wait for you to get back.”

Remus sighed, pinching his nose between his thumb and index finger, “Alice, I’m fine. It wasn’t even a panic attack it was just –” he broke off. What had it been? He didn’t even know, “An episode.” He settled upon this answer, and watched as Alice narrowed her eyes at him.

“That sounds worse than a panic attack.”

“No it doesn’t.”

“Yes it does.”

“Alice, I swear to God I will hang up if you don’t stop that.” Remus glared at her until she sighed, rolling her eyes,

“You *should* get tea though, because I want to get tea and it would be impolite to leave my best friend alone when he’s in a state of distress.” She was smirking at him now, teasing him.

“I’m *not* -” Another sigh, “Fine, I’ll make tea. I’ll be back in five minutes, make sure you’re here.”

Remus climbed up from where he had been sat cross legged on his bed and made his way out into the corridor, heading in the direction of the kitchen when he heard the sound of someone crashing through the door at the end of the hall. He looked back and saw Sirius, clearly drunk, carrying a holey tarpaulin sheet around his shoulders like a cape and scraping his foot along the floor in an effort it dislodge something white and sticky from the bottom of his boot. He looked up and grinned, holding his arms out so that the tarpaulin stretched like bat’s wings,

“Moouooooonaaay!” He seemed to forget about whatever was stuck to his foot and surged up the hall, throwing an arm around Remus (who blushed, dammit), wrapping him in plastic sheeting in the process, “The prank was a success, thanks to our master commander.”

A door behind Remus opened, and he looked back to see Marlene poking her head out into the corridor, wearing a pair of flowery blue pyjamas and a groggy expression, “Could you keep it down? Some of us are trying to –” She stopped mid sentence, her eyes widening, “Why are you wearing a bit of old plastic?”

Sirius pushed Remus aside, presenting his arm to Marlene as if he was wearing some kind of rare fabric, “*This*, Marls, is my *invisibility cloak*, thank you very much.”

Remus snorted with laughter, which he admitted was not very attractive at all, but consoled himself by noting that Sirius probably wouldn’t remember it in the morning, not in his state.

Marlene crossed her arms across her chest and quirked an eyebrow, “*Invisibility cloak*? Just what exactly makes it an invisibility cloak?”

At that moment, James and Peter arrived behind Remus in the corridor and they seemed to be, thank God, sober.

“He hid under it when we thought we heard someone coming,” James explained, looking exasperated, “We couldn’t get him to leave it behind.”

“We couldn’t get him to stay away from the jelly shots either, as you can probably tell.” Peter seemed out of breath, and Remus realised the other two must have been running to try and catch Sirius, “Then he ran off, flapping that bloody cloak of his and shouting ‘I am the night’. Bloody idiot, if you ask me.”

Sirius had stopped listening by that point, and had begun scraping his boot along the floor again, trying to get rid of whatever was stuck there.

“Mate, what *is* that?” James asked, squinting at Sirius’ feet. A look of realisation dawned upon his face, and he began laughing hysterically.

“I think we’ve found him a nickname, men,” James declared, after his bout of laughter had petered off.

Remus smirked, finally realising what the object was the Sirius had been so insistent on leaving on the hall carpet, “What’s that then, Prongs?”

“Padfoot.”

“Morning, Pads,” Remus sidled up to Sirius the next morning, who was sat at the kitchen table with his forehead pressed against the wood, moaning softly, “How’s your head?”

“Why does everyone keep calling me that?” Sirius muttered, his face hidden by his arms, which were wrapped around his head in an effort to keep out the light.

“It’s your nickname, stupid,” Remus went to the fridge to take out a carton of orange juice, and took a swig directly from the box, “Just like Moony’s mine, isn’t that nice, Padfoot?”

Sirius groaned and Remus grinned. He was enjoying this way more than he should have been,

admittedly, but Sirius had been so annoying with his nickname that Remus felt some revenge was in order.

“But I don’t like it,” Sirius moaned, moving his head so he was peeking just above his arms, glaring at Remus, “That’s not fair.”

Remus laughed, placing the carton back in the fridge and shutting the door a little louder than necessary, “Hey, I never liked being called Moony, either.” He went about making cereal, ensuring that the process was as loud as possible and watching Sirius wince as he placed his bowl down on the table next to his head, “So, are you ready for the tryouts later?” Remus wore an innocent grin, but Sirius looked at him as if he was the devil,

“No way, not happening,” Sirius murmured into his sleeve, “Brain no work, not today.”

Remus acted as if this response had shocked him, placing a hand on his chest and raising his eyebrows. Sirius glared.

“But, Padfoot, you were the one that signed us up in the first place; you have to go!”

“Oh, shut up,” Sirius said bitterly, “Fine, you win, I’m sorry I put your name down, but we all knew that you’d do better than I would.”

Remus smiled, satisfied that he had finally got an apology, “Thank you, Padfoot,” He stopped banging his spoon so loudly against the side of his bowl every time he went to get some more Cheerios, “I’ll go on my own, I don’t mind. You should go back to bed.”

“Can’t, I have a workshop in five minutes.” Sirius groaned but made no effort to move; despite the fact the art building was at least a fifteen minute walk away. Remus decided that it would be cruel to point this out to the poor boy, and instead took his washing up over to the sink and left it on the draining board, planning to do it later after his morning lecture, and made his way back over to Sirius, who was beginning to snore lightly. He placed a hand softly on his back and whispered, “Text me if you need me to come back, my young *Padawan*.”

Sirius grunted.

Chapter 3

Gilderoy Lockhart – 13:05 – Congratulations! You have been chosen to fill one of two reserve spots on our 2015/16 University Challenge team! First meeting is Monday at 19:00

Remus wasn't entirely sure of what to do. He had been told by one Lucius Malfoy, a boy four years his senior, not five minutes before the tryouts that first years never make the university team, and therefore was now sure that this text had been sent to the wrong person. Searching for a second opinion, he showed it to James over breakfast as the two of them grazed at a leftover takeaway the next day. Unfortunately, Remus had forgotten all about James' all too overenthusiastic school spirit,

"You got on the team?!" He was almost yelling, despite it being half past seven in the morning. Time didn't seem to have the same effect on James as it did Remus; the former had already been out to the gym and jogged around the city, whereas Remus had barely managed to put his jeans on without falling over, "You'll be representing the uni! I'm so proud of you!" Indeed, tears had begun to form in the boy's hazel eyes, threatening to spill over and make the scene at least four times more embarrassing.

"I'm only a reserve," Remus shrugged, trying to make James understand that it really wasn't as big a deal as he was making it out to be, "I'm not going to be on telly or anything, I probably won't even get a chance to take part."

James wasn't listening to him. He had snatched Remus' phone from the table and taken a photograph of the text, no doubt to send to Sirius and Peter – that boy couldn't keep a secret if Arsenal's place in the Premier League depended on it – and began babbling enthusiastically, his gangly arms gesticulating wildly.

"And we'll all drive down to London to watch you – my parents can arrange transport and accommodation, of course; I'm sure they won't mind you and the lads taking up a few of the spare rooms. And me and Pads can make *banners*! God, this is going to be great; *our Moony* on TV!"

Remus sighed, dropping his head into his hands and rubbing his eyes, his tone bemused and tired, "I'm not going to be on TV, Prongs."

"Course you are," James scoffed, waving a dismissive hand, "No one knows more about poncy rubbish than you."

Remus looked up at James again, who was grinning as if what he had just said hadn't been mildly insulting, and quirked an eyebrow, "I hate to break it to you, Prongs, but you're the ponciest bastard I've ever met in my life." This was not strictly true – after all, he had met Gilderoy Lockhart – but then again, being from Yorkshire, he had not met many posh people at all.

James narrowed his eyes, "You ought to be careful, Lupin," He jabbed his fork in Remus' direction, scattering lukewarm rice all over the table, "Or me and Sirius *will* make banners, and I *don't* think Jeremy Paxman will be impressed."

"Prongs said you got in,"

"What?" Remus tore his eyes away from the copy of *Wuthering Heights* on the table in front of him at the sound of a voice, looking around somewhat frantically for the source. Spotting Sirius, he stopped, marking his page and putting the volume back in his bag, "Oh, yeah."

A grin broke out on his friend's face, cracking his tanned face in a way that seemed almost entirely too real to be anything but false, "Great!" He slid into the chair opposite Remus at the kitchen table, avoiding meeting his eyes straight on, "Knew you would; proud, and all that." His words were encouraging and friendly, but his tone was dismissive, as if he was brushing Remus off.

Remus eyed him suspiciously - this wasn't the first time that Sirius had given him the cold shoulder for seemingly no reason; he was getting used to it. At random times Sirius' 'Drama Queen' switch seemed to flick on and he would blow up something rather insignificant to gargantuan proportions. He considered allowing Sirius to continue to mope, albeit in a less dramatic way than usual, as that would avoid him actually *having to talk to him*, but then remembered the awful twisting sensation that manifested in his stomach whenever Sirius glared at him, and pressed on, "Pads, what have I done this time?"

Sirius looked affronted, and his eyes widened a little with shock, "What? Nothing, why would you -?"

"Dude," Remus cut across him, quirking an eyebrow and looking at him knowingly. Sirius visibly deflated, his shoulders drooping under his leather jacket, and closed his eyes as he exhaled slowly.

"Fine," he elongated the 'I' for as long as he possibly could, "It's stupid, I know, I was just kind of -" He broke off again, slumping down on the table, his dark hair fanning out in front of him as he stretched his arms out across the light wood, "It's nothing, I'm just being an idiot." He mumbled his words into the table, not bothering to look up.

Remus poked Sirius' arm in a way he hoped was endearing and mildly comforting, "Hey,"

Sirius looked up, still lying mostly on the kitchen table, looking extremely similar to the morning after the invisibility cloak incident. His cheeks were red, and he looked rather sheepish, though his eyes looked heavy, as if he had been awake half the night (which Remus knew he definitely had been, as he had been kept up by Panic! At The Disco until 3am), "I was upset you told James before me, okay?"

Remus couldn't help it; he felt a bubble of laughter escape his lips before he could stop it, "Really?"

Sirius groaned and fell back to the table, covering his head with his arms. Remus squirmed in his seat, realising how he would feel if the same had happened to him. Maybe he wouldn't have had the guts to tell Sirius how he would have felt, but if he had, he was sure that getting only a laugh in response would ensure he would not be telling anyone *anything* for quite some time.

"I'm sorry," He said quickly, paling. Sirius shifted, and Remus saw a grey eye peek up at him through the tangle of limbs and hair on the table,

"Don't be stupid, I was out all day, of course you told Prongs first."

Remus pinched his nose, "I meant about laughing, that was a shitty thing to do, I'm sorry." Remus, too, slumped down on to the table, his arms flat out in front of him, either side of the mass of Sirius on the surface, "I know if it was me I'd feel rubbish."

Sirius sat up straight and Remus had to crane his neck upwards to see him. His hair was now wildly

tousled around his face, "You would?" The corner of his mouth twitched, "Moonboat, I never knew you cared."

Remus relaxed, smiling, glad that they were back to their usual banter, and pushed himself back up so he was sat straight across from Sirius, "Definitely a made up word. You need to stop trying so hard, Paddycake."

Sirius smirked, "Always thought it was 'pattycake', myself."

"Artistic licence," Remus shrugged, tapping two fingers idly on the cover of his book, "You'll still practice with me, yeah? I can't stand that Gilderoy, he's so pompous."

Sirius' eyes lit up at the prospect and Remus felt a swooping sensation in his stomach, making him feel rather ill, but in a curiously nice way, "Of course, Moonbeam," Sirius winked, and Remus thought he might have just felt his heart stop, "I'd do anything for you."

The first team practice went well for Remus, considering that he had not met the majority of the people there, who were all much older and more intimidating than Remus, though, Sirius had insisted, there was no way that they could be cooler. Remus grinned at the memory, but fought hard against it, trying to keep his face neutral in case any of the others noticed and asked him why he was blushing.

There were five other people in the tiny student union room, all with large notebooks placed on the table in front of them, something Remus had not considered to bring, which he hoped would not lose him popularity amongst the group. They all seemed to be taking the competition much more seriously than Remus had expected. He had been thinking of the team practices as something fun to do to take his mind off of the ever impending deadlines that had been inching closer every day on the countdown app on his phone; however he knew instantly that he had misinterpreted this.

Gilderoy, sat at the head of the table and grinning his absurdly white grin, had spent the first ten minutes of the session recounting the epic tale of how he, as captain of the team last year, had managed to direct Durham University's *University Challenge* team all the way to the television show's finals, where Edinburgh had defeated them in a landslide, 250 points to 35. He insisted, however, that this had had nothing to do with the fact that he had kept buzzing in with the wrong answer before the announcer had finished the question, thus losing the team the few points that they had, but had everything to do with Edinburgh's captain reading the questions beforehand and memorising all of the answers.

Remus had quirked an eyebrow at that – he had rewatched last year's final on BBC iPlayer the previous night and could have sworn that the captain had known less than the other three on his team. He told himself not to call out Gilderoy's blatant lies, however, as he did not want his first impression to be that of a tell-tale.

The majority of the other team members were in their third or fourth year of studying, however the second reserve, a short, stout architecture student by the name of Amos Diggory, was in his fifth. The main team was then completed by Lucius Malfoy, the fourth year chemistry student who had tried to psych him out before the try outs; Sybill Trelawney, a third year philosophy student with 90s-esque glasses that magnified her eyes; and Kingsley Shacklebolt, a third year history student who Remus thought was possibly the coolest person he had ever met in his life. So much for Sirius believing that he would be the least nerdy.

Remus Lupin - 19:05 - *Dude you won't believe this there's someone here cooler than you*

Sirius Black - 19:07 - *not possible they're all nerds*

Sirius Black - 19:07 - *nerds nerds nerds*

Remus Lupin - 19:08 - *Kingsley Shacklebolt. Heard of him? I think I'm in love*

Sirius Black - 19:09 - *SHACK'S THERE? oh man hooch is going to be so mad if he skips football for uni chal*

Sirius Black - 19:10 - *and u can't be in love moonfly bc u love me*

(Remus almost dropped his phone under the table, his cheeks turning bright red.)

Remus Lupin - 19:12 - *You are completely ridiculous. I h9 U.*

Sirius Black - 19:13 - *"h9ine"*

Remus Lupin - 19:14 - *Shut up, I'm at practice I need to concentrate*

Sirius Black - 19:15 - *is that on the questions or shack's biceps??*

Remus Lupin - 19:16 - *Shut up shut up shut up shut up*

October made way for November, the weeks crawling by in a haze of assigned reading and team practices. The constant pressure from both sides of his now surprisingly busy life was making Remus' constant low-key anxiety a lot more noticeable, and he had noticed that his friends kept shooting him concerned looks whenever he needed to take a breather. The only time Remus did not feel entirely on edge was when Sirius stopped by his room on an evening, declaring he had found more quiz questions but spending the majority of his time on Youtube playing pop punk in a hopeless attempt to win Remus over. The anxiety that was gripping his chest almost as hard as the chilly November air had become so constant that eventually he barely noticed it; he found he was so nervous about the team's application to the BBC and his first graded essay (both due on the same Friday – Remus thought that he may just die) that he barely cared anymore.

"You've broken, Moony," Sirius told him matter-of-factly after he had confessed; "University has broken you."

Remus quirked an eyebrow, watching where Sirius sat with his Macbook on his knee, wearing a pair of pyjama bottoms and his football shirt. His hair was tied up in a bun out of his face, but after practice in the afternoon it had become messy, with flyaway hairs hanging down around his face, which had a streak of mud down one cheek that he hadn't bothered to wash off yet. Remus felt himself feeling rather sorry that Sirius hadn't kept on his shorts.

"Seriously, Moonbeam, you should take a break, your first year's supposed to be the party year!" Sirius threw his arms up and wiggled them around as if to demonstrate, before shrugging and returning to his laptop, "You can't just sit and stress about things that don't even matter."

"*'Things that don't matter'*? What, like an essay worth 10% of my final grade, or the application to get on a *national TV programme*?" Remus' voice was getting higher as he became more and more frantic, his chest feeling tight. It felt to him as if the room had just got a lot colder, and snaked his

arms around his middle, his fingers playing with the tiny pills of wool that covered his jumper to stop his fingers from shaking. Panic was starting to creep over him, and he couldn't let that happen, not in front of Sirius.

"Moony, really, you're only a reserve."

"That doesn't make any difference!" Remus threw his hands up in the air - not, like Sirius, in a mock celebration, but in a strangely panicked motion, his eyes wide. Sirius looked shocked, but his expression quickly shifted as he moved the computer off of his lap and leant forward.

"Remus!" He took hold of Remus' arms by the wrists and brought them out of the air, holding his hands down by the duvet they were sat on, "Calm down and just, I don't know, take deep breaths?" he looked concerned, and did not let go of Remus' wrists until he was satisfied they would not fly into the air again as soon as he let go. Remus did not like the feel of Sirius' hands on his arms – he felt as if Sirius was grasping something that wasn't really there, like Remus wasn't real. *Shit.*

He pulled his arms back into him, watching as Sirius seemed to watch them for a moment with his own still outstretched, before leaning back. He said nothing, just watched Remus with that concerned look still on his face, then got up and moved towards the door.

Great, Remus thought, I've freaked him out – he's going to leave and I'm going to be alone again and then what? He drew his legs up the bed and wrapped his arms around his knees, hugging them to his chest as Sirius left the room, the door open and gaping like a mouth.

He sat alone for at least five minutes, though time did not seem to be passing as normal anymore. He didn't feel as if he was inhabiting his own body. He felt like his whole self was trapped somewhere just behind his eyes, curled up and tiny, unable to see an escape, unable to return to how it should be, only able to peer out into the gloom of his bedroom.

His skin felt cold, and he closed his eyes against the loud clinking sounds coming from down the hall in the kitchen – the noise was rattling around his brain as if it was empty. Suddenly something hot was thrust into his fingers, and he was forced to open his eyes to prevent spilling any of the mug over his bedclothes. As the warmth moved slowly through his fingers he felt the panic start to subside slightly.

"You okay, mate?"

Remus' head shot up from the mug in his fingers and his eyes fell upon Sirius, looking even more bedraggled than he had done before, a tea towel wrapped around his left hand and half of his bun falling out. The smell of hot chocolate was filling Remus' head, waking up his brain and allowing him to think straight again.

"Reg used to get like that sometimes;" Sirius continued carefully, seemingly aware that Remus couldn't take a lot of noise at the moment, "he always said a hot drink helped him feel a bit better. I don't know, though," He shrugged, getting up from the bed to close the bedroom door, returning the room to its previous gloomy state, "Everyone's different, I guess."

Remus moved the mug, grasped in both of his shaking hands, and blew on its contents before taking a sip. The liquid scalded his tongue but he didn't mind, "No, it's –" Remus broke off, not sure of what to say. His voice was quieter than usual, and his throat felt scratchy, "Nice. I feel better."

Sirius slipped back onto the bed across from Remus, sat with his legs crossed, but said nothing. Remus still felt strange, like his brain was full of TV static, but he was no longer dissociating,

which he was grateful for.

“Your brother has anxiety?” Remus asked after a few more slow sips of hot chocolate. Sirius had been watching him carefully and still spoke more softly than usual,

“He kept having panic attacks during his GCSEs; mum got him to visit a psychologist.” Sirius paused, “It really helped him, you know, the counselling?”

Remus looked up at him, his face set, “I’m fine, I’ve been coping with this for years. Since I was a kid.” Remus saw Sirius go to ask another question, but answered it before he could, “Dad knows, but mum just thinks I’m shy – I don’t want her to worry about me.”

He did not know why he was telling Sirius all of this – he had never told anyone everything about his anxiety before, not even Alice. There was something about Sirius that made Remus want to open his heart and pour out the contents. He felt safe with him – safer than he had in a very long time – and even though he still found it completely ridiculous that someone who looked like Sirius would even consider hanging around with someone like Remus, he was grateful for it all the same.

Sirius inched closer to Remus on the mattress, his fingers fumbling with the tea towel wrapped around his palm, which Remus now noticed had started dripping water onto his duvet cover. When he spoke his voice was still soft, but held an edge of its usual hardness, “If you don’t want to do this *University Challenge* thing anymore then you don’t have to, you know? And if that Gilderoy starts having a go at you or some shit me and Prongs’ll sort him out, don’t worry.”

Remus felt himself laugh, “Thanks, Pads,” he smiled at Sirius, who seemed to relax slightly, “What did you do to your hand?” Remus asked, pointing to the drenched fabric that Sirius was now untying.

“I spilt the kettle but don’t worry,” Sirius shrugged, pulling the towel from his red, blistered palm, “I’ve had worse.”

He pointed to the door as if to ask permission to leave, and Remus nodded at him. As he watched Sirius go, Remus felt a familiar squirming in his stomach and downed the rest of his hot chocolate, before placing the mug down on his bedside table, noting, only briefly, that it was Sirius’ favourite.

The team’s application to the BBC was a success, and the six members had been told that their first episode would be recorded in three weeks time, which led to a wave of panic washing over not only Remus, but the rest of the group too. Gilderoy, in particular, was not taking the news well, constantly muttering under his breath before, one week prior to their first show, he exploded,

“*We don’t have enough time!*” his voice was higher than usual, and he waved his arms about his head like a drowning swimmer trying to summon a lifeguard, “We’ve never been on so early before – we cannot possibly be ready we just *can’t!*”

The table fell silent. Remus felt a familiar contracting feeling in his chest and took several deep breaths. He saw Sybill give Kingsley a significant look, her eyes magnified several times over behind her spectacles. She reached out a hand to pat Gilderoy on the arm sympathetically, a deep purple shawl trailing along the table as it hung off of her arm,

“I’m sure it’ll be *fine*, Gilderoy,” She had a deep, misty voice that made Remus think of fairground fortune tellers. Sybill then turned towards the others and nodded seriously, “I checked all of our

horoscopes and the only one foretelling disaster was Amos', and he's only a reserve."

Kingsley gave a short laugh, which he quickly transformed into a coughing fit after a glare from Trelawney. Remus smirked and pulled his phone out under the table, texting Sirius in his lap,

Remus Lupin – 19:35 – *Apparently Gilderoy would rather have someone who believes horoscopes on the first team than me.*

Amos seemed rather panicked by what Sybill had said, and was currently pressuring her for further information across the table while Gilderoy continued to mutter at the head, his fingers knotted in his hair and a pained expression on his face. Kingsley and Lucius were sat watching him, the former with a look of mild concern, but the latter smirking as if he had known that this was coming all along. Remus tapped two fingers idly on the notebook in front of him, thinking that if they weren't going to be doing any work he may as well go back to his room and finish up *The Great Gatsby* before Sirius turned up and quizzed him on the periodic table. Before Remus could muster up the courage to ask to leave, however, Gilderoy found his voice again,

"So," He sounded shaky, but his trademark smile was back, and he smoothed the front of his lilac shirt with his hands before turning to Lucius, "How far through your general science research have you got?"

Remus sighed and looked at Amos, who rolled his eyes knowingly. Remus didn't know why he and Amos were required at every group meeting, they were rarely asked to recall any information or ask any questions. As reserves, however, they had the hardest job, having to have an all round knowledge instead of a specific speciality in case someone had to drop out at the last minute, and so Remus didn't know why Gilderoy didn't quiz them so much. Remus spent most of the team practices scribbling down the questions and their answers into his notebook so that he could memorise them later, and at times when he wasn't writing he was texting Sirius under the table.

His phone buzzed in his jeans pocket,

Sirius Black – 19:41 – *my mum was so obsessed with horoscopes you wouldnt believe it*

Remus Lupin – 19:42 – *Is that why she named you after a fucking star?*

Sirius Black – 19:43 – *nah family tradition innit – im the third sirius so far*

Remus Lupin – 19:44 – *Jesus Christ. The more I hear about your family the more fucked up they sound.*

Sirius Black – 19:45 – *trust me, it gets worse*

Remus' brow furrowed as he frowned at his phone screen. He was about to start a reply when Amos elbowed him sharply in the ribs, dragging him away from Sirius and back to the group.

"What?" He asked, as he noticed that everyone was looking at him. His stomach twisted uncomfortably, "Did I miss something?" Remus felt his cheeks going pink, and he slipped his phone back into his pocket as quickly as he could despite his now trembling fingers.

"I *said* that Kingsley needs help with classic literature and that you'd surely be able to help," Gilderoy narrowed his eyes slightly, folding his arms, "But if you're too busy *texting*..."

"No!" Remus held his hands up in front of him, feeling a bubble of panic rise in his chest. This was all his fault, he shouldn't have been texting Sirius, he should have been paying attention, he

shouldn't be drawing attention to himself. This was all his *stupid* fault, "No, sorry, I'm sorry," He swallowed hard, imagining himself forcing the bubble back down to his stomach where it came from, "Yeah, I can help Kingsley." He finished with a rather unconvincing smile – his eyes still wide and panicked and his grin just a bit too toothy.

He thought he preferred it when they didn't take notice of him.

Gilderoy Lockhart – 20:58 – *We won! Training for the next round starts this Monday and we'll now be meeting twice a week – See you there!*

Remus started down at his phone for a few moments, before holding it up to the webcam on his laptop.

"Remus, you know the camera's white balance can't take that." Alice said flatly from the screen, her voice tinny and her pretty face pixelated. Remus tried to hold it straighter so that the webcam could adjust to the intense change in light, but Alice sighed, "Just read me the freaking text, you nerd."

"Oh, right," Remus cleared his throat, then recited the message to Alice, who frowned,

"Wait, you didn't go with them?" She asked, "I thought you were on the team?"

Remus rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands, groaning. She was not the first to have asked him this; James had threatened to follow the team to Manchester and beat them up for Remus, but he insisted he would rather stay at home than to sit on the sidelines and not be included, and that no beating up was in order because he didn't feel insulted, "Me and Diggory stayed here – we weren't needed so..." He trailed off, shrugging, "Hey, at least we got through though."

Alice was still frowning, "Wait, should you be telling me this? I mean, they won't air it for ages, isn't there some kind of confidentiality thing like with *Doctor Who*?" She looked excited now, her brown eyes wide as she grinned.

"It's not exactly as high profile as *Doctor Who*, is it?" Remus picked up a mug of tea from his bedside table and took a sip before continuing, "Anyway, how are things at Reading with Frank?"

Alice, thankfully, had a lot to say on the topic of the last week – she and Frank had been to the cinema, which gave Remus a good fifteen minutes of gushing about cinematography to ignore while he enjoyed his cup of tea. Alice was doing film studies at university, which meant that after every movie she went to see Remus and Frank had to sit through a lecture on how well (or terribly) the movie had been made, but fortunately she got so into it that she never noticed that neither of them really listened, only nodded and made affirming noises whenever she paused.

"Anyway, enough about me; how are things with lover boy?"

Remus' head snapped up at that, and he glared at Alice, only half joking when he said,

"I hate you so very very much, did you know that?"

Alice threw her head back and laughed, her dark brown bob shaking like a mane around her face, "Oh, come on, Remus! You should ask him out, just do it! I always thought Frank didn't like me and look how that turned out."

It was true, but Remus still found himself squirming under her gaze, "Yeah but you're different.

You two weren't mates," Remus sighed, "What if I tell him and then he decides he doesn't want to be friends with me anymore because, I don't know, he's freaked out?"

"I promise you that that will not happen." She looked so sure that Remus almost believed her for a few moments, and his fingers inched towards his phone, but he stopped himself,

"I don't want to lose him, Al."

Remus deflated, his shoulders sagging. His stomach twisted in a way that was both uncomfortable and extremely familiar. His fingers found his hair and he grasped it, groaning. He couldn't deal with this.

"You won't lose him. From what you've told me this boy is your best friend. You can't lose best friends like that, Remus." Alice was too good at this. Remus was actually starting to seriously consider texting Sirius and confessing, and she could tell. He shook his head, attempting to clear it,

"He's not my *best friend*, Al, that's you.

Alice snorted, "Yeah, sure," She took a drink from a mug on the screen, then grinned at him, "its okay, Remus, I've noticed you don't text me as much, you've moved on."

Remus shifted uncomfortably, guilt washing over him, "I'm sorry, Al, I just –"

"Dude," She interrupted him, holding up a hand, an understanding smile painted on her delicate features, "I understand, this is what's supposed to happen. I'm not angry; you noticed that I don't text you as much? That's because the same thing's happening here," She paused, "I still love you though." Alice winked at him, which made Remus laugh,

"Yeah, I love you too, Al," The guilt dissipated as quickly as it had risen in his chest, and he relaxed, taking another sip of tea, "So you think I should tell him?"

He didn't even know why he was considering it. Alice, he supposed, had an odd effect on him. The last time they had been together she had forced him to go on a night out which had ended with Remus drunkenly snogging *someone* in a gay bar. He was so drunk by that point, however, that he could barely remember it. He supposed that Alice made him feel secure – it was probably the way that she spoke. She often promised him that things would be okay when he thought that they wouldn't and found himself believing her instantly.

"I think that you should if you want to."

Remus thought about this for a few moments. Did he want to? He had known Sirius for more than three months now and still felt his stomach do somersaults whenever he entered a room, and he still blushed whenever he touched him. That had to be a sign, didn't it? Remus didn't know what to think, but found himself reaching for the phone on his duvet and unlocking it.

"It'll be okay, won't it, Al?" He asked, his thumb hovering over the messaging icon, his heart hammering in his ears.

"I promise." She smiled.

"Where's Pads?"

James almost jumped out of his skin, having obviously not heard Remus walk up behind him in the

kitchen before he spoke. Remus had not received a reply to the text he had sent Sirius at half past nine the previous night, and, after knocking of the boy's door for fifteen minutes the next morning, he had started to feel the panic bubbling in his chest again.

"Did he not tell you?" James turned away from his kitchen cupboard to face Remus, hopping up to sit on the sideboard, "He went home for the weekend – set off last night."

Remus wished for James to hop off of the counter and punch him squarely in the jaw for being such an idiot. Of course he had sent Sirius the text on the *one night* he was on a train to the other side of England, of course *he* would do that. He buried his face in his hands, groaning, before mumbling a thank you to James and leaving.

He resigned himself to hiding in his room for the remainder of the weekend, with only his hidden chocolate biscuit rations and Arctic Monkeys records to get him through it. He had reading to do for his course, but didn't really feel like romance novels at the moment, and so he pulled out his phone,

Remus Lupin – 11:18 – ABORT MISSION

Alice Prewett – 11:19 – Shit, what happened? What has he said?

Remus Lupin – 11:20 – NOTHING HE'S SAID NOTHING ABSOLUTELY NOTHING kill me right now

Alice Prewett – 11:21 – OK, don't get me wrong, but can't you just go next door and ask him why in person?

Remus Lupin – 11:22 – HE'S GONE HOME FOR THE WEEKEND OBVIOUSLY. HE DOESN'T EVEN LIKE HIS FAMILY, ALICE, WHY HAS HE GONE HOME????????

Alice Prewett – 11:23 – Calm down, Remus. Do you need me to call you?

Remus Lupin – 11:23 – No, I'm fine.

Remus Lupin – 11:24 – I think. I don't know. I'm not sure.

Alice Prewett – 11:25 – Okay. Deep breaths. It'll be okay. Maybe he just doesn't have signal?

Remus sighed. Of course, that would be it. Wherever Sirius' family's fancy house was probably didn't have signal. He probably lived in the middle of the bloody countryside or something.

Remus Lupin – 11:26 – You're probably right, I'll just wait until he gets back. I'm fine, don't worry about me.

Alice Prewett – 11:27 – You know whenever you say that I worry about you like 200x more, right?

Remus heard Sirius arrive back in their hall late on Sunday night, and his stomach lurched so violently he thought he might be sick. There was a great deal more banging and clattering next door than usual, and Remus could swear he heard the sound of smashing crockery, which did not bode well. He considered hiding in his room for the rest of his life – he probably had enough chocolate biscuits – but then Alice's voice popped into his head telling him to get off of his arse and *talk to him*. Remus considered staying put for a few more moments, after all Sirius probably

wouldn't appreciate Remus turning up before he got a chance to unpack, but then decided the longer he dragged this out, the worse it would be.

He got off of his bed, checking his reflection in the mirror on his bookshelf briefly, brushing his fringe out of his face with his fingers, which he noted were shaking. He took a deep breath before opening his door and stepping out into the hallway, trying to ignore how much he *really* felt like vomiting at that moment. He knocked on Sirius' door, which was met by the muffled sound of a long string of curse words, before the door was opened so forcefully that Remus took a step backwards.

"What?" Sirius asked as he pulled the door towards him, then, seeing Remus, his expression changed, "Oh, it's you."

His face was unreadable, which just made Remus feel worse, but he nodded and swallowed hard, "Hi, I was just –"

"Sorry, I just –" Sirius and Remus spoke at exactly the same time, but both broke off at the same moment. Remus looked down at his feet – he hadn't bothered to put on shoes and he was still wearing the same socks he had put on yesterday, which was disgusting, but it was hard to do anything when he felt so empty – and Sirius continued.

"I got your text."

"Oh," Remus did not look up. He couldn't. He didn't want to know what kind of expression was on Sirius' face as he said it. He didn't want to know the answer.

"I'm sorry I didn't reply – I went to a gig with some mates but I bumped into my brother and it all went a bit –" He broke off and Remus heard him sigh, "Anyway I ended up seeing my mother, which is enough to make anyone forget a text message, no matter what it said."

Remus was still staring at his feet, "It's okay, I didn't mind, I figured you were busy or something." He wished Sirius would just tell him his reply already, drawing it out was just making him feel worse.

"Do you want to come in, or are you just going to stand in the hall all night?" Remus looked up at that and saw that Sirius was smiling at him. His stomach did an odd little flip that was completely unlike any of the anxiety induced ones he had experienced before. He was sure this meant that Sirius didn't hold anything against him, or, Remus dared hope, that he was even considering what he had asked.

He followed Sirius back into his bedroom, where the remnants of a shattered plate littered the corner of the room. Sirius laughed sheepishly, "My mother doesn't bring out the best in me," He scratched the back of his neck before hopping into his office chair and indicating towards the bed with a wave of his hand as if to invite Remus to sit.

Remus didn't know what to say, and drew his legs up into his chest, hugging his knees as he settled on Sirius' duvet, avoiding making direct eye contact. The silence felt thick around them like fog, so Remus asked the first question he could think of, "Who – who did you go see?"

Sirius barked a laugh, "*That's* what you're going to ask?" He swung around to face his desk and pulled a t shirt out of his backpack, throwing it at Remus, who unfolded it and read the band's name. Sirius moved closer to him, getting up from the chair and perching on the edge of his bed, "No but seriously, I'm sorry about not replying, I know it must have stressed you out."

Remus shrugged, trying to make it seem like not such a big deal. He didn't like Sirius worrying about him like his, so he chose to change the subject, "Gilderoy said the team got through to the next round; we have about two months until the next recording."

Sirius laughed again, "Did you come over here to talk to me about it or not?" He was still smiling, and Remus caught himself doing the same,

"Well, I did but now I'm here..." He trailed off, suddenly catching Sirius' eye and having to stop himself. Sirius was looking at him in a way he was sure no one had looked at him before and Remus felt his face burning, forcing himself to look away before he said anything stupid.

"Moony –" Sirius started, but Remus finally found his voice.

"Shut up," A strange courage rose inside of him, gripping him by the shoulders, kicking him in the stomach and telling him to get a fucking grip already and kiss the stupidly gorgeous boy sat staring at him like he was made of gold, "Just shut up, okay?" He moved so that he was knelt now, closer to where Sirius was sat on the edge of the bed, he managed to look into the other boy's eyes as he asked, his voice strong and entirely unlike his own, "I'm going to kiss you now, is that okay?"

Sirius looked taken aback for a second, before he grinned and nodded. Before the boy could move, however, Remus took hold of his stupid handsome face and kissed him, feeling Sirius' arms around his shoulders, his fingers in his hair. This felt better than anything he had ever done in his life – it was possibly the best decision he had ever made; kissing this complete *idiot*. All of his anxieties ebbed away and then there was nothing but Sirius, and Sirius' lips, and his hands on his neck - and then suddenly there was nothing at all.

He opened his eyes and saw that Sirius had pulled away, very pink in the face, and was grinning in an uncharacteristically bashful way,

"Well, Moonshine, you were keeping *that* quiet, weren't you?"

Remus felt colour rise in his cheeks again, and he shrugged, averting his gaze from Sirius' grey eyes.

"The answer's yes, by the way." Sirius said, as if it was an afterthought. Remus looked at him quizzically, his mind so frazzled by Sirius' kiss that he couldn't think straight. Sirius laughed and shook his head, "The text; the answer's yes. Moony, I've felt that way since the moment you first corrected my grammar."

Remus returned to his room five minutes later, feeling like a new person. He reached for his phone, grinning madly.

Alice wasn't going to believe this.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Well, it took me a while but I finally finished it!!!! This is the first multichapter fic I've ever actually finished so I'm a tiny bit proud, even though it took me about a year. So, here you go, MERRY CHRISTMAS!

“GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMOONS, LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY!”

Remus groaned and rolled over, pulling his thick winter duvet up over his head in a doomed attempt to block out Sirius' incessant singing – if you could even call it that. Remus, despite his apathy, supposed Sirius might have had a nice voice (even, perhaps, quite beautiful) except that no one's voice was nice at half past six in the morning, especially when said person kept you awake until one AM the previous night. He didn't know how his boyfriend did it.

“Piss off, Pads,”

Sirius broke off his chorus abruptly, staring at Remus from where he stood in the centre of the room, wearing Christmas pyjamas and a Santa hat perched jauntily atop his head. He gasped; over exaggerated and mocking; placing a hand over his chest, “Moons, how dare you defile the spirit of Christmas with your foul mouth!”

Remus rolled over again to face him, wrapping his duvet cocoon closer still around himself, and raised his eyebrows, “You didn't think it was that foul earlier, I seem to remember.”

Sirius moved to sit on the end of the bed, shaking his head as he moved, “Foul, *dirty* mouth,” He grinned at Remus, a glint in his eye, “*Disgusting.*”

Remus rolled his eyes and shuffled backwards against the wall so as to appease Sirius, who had begun to nudge his leg like a sad puppy who wanted petting, which, Remus thought, was probably what he was. All talk of Christmas seemingly forgotten, Sirius curled up next to Remus and hummed contentedly,

“Spoon me with your lanky limbs, Moonboy.”

Remus gave the back of Sirius' head a pointed look, “Okay, no,” He sat up, pulling the duvet from around himself and climbing out of bed, “I hate you.”

Sirius whined, “Where's your Christmas spirit?”

“It's the first of December.” Remus glared at Sirius as he pulled on a pair of checked pyjama bottoms, and watched the boy roll onto his back, throwing his arms above his head on the pillow so that he was laid like a tragic romantic heroine, which, Remus thought, was probably what he was.

“It's the first of *Christmas*. Have you opened your advent calendar yet?”

Remus fished his t-shirt out from under his desk where it had been thrown the night before and pulled it on, the pink colour clashing awfully with the red of his trousers, which had been Sirius' main excuse for taking them off, “Dude, are you telling me you still have one?”

Sirius sat up abruptly, his eyes hard and his Santa hat askew, "Are you telling me you *don't*?" Remus nodded at him slowly, and Sirius tutted, "I'm sorry, I didn't realise I was dating *Ebenezer Scrooge*."

Dating. Remus' stomach flipped at the sound of the word. It had been almost a month since Remus had finally grown a backbone and kissed Sirius, and he was surprised to find that going out with him felt so... normal. Perhaps it was because Sirius had already spent ninety percent of his life in Remus' room, now he just did it in less clothes.

He moved over to where Sirius sat on the bed, still looking slightly miffed, and kissed him on the forehead lightly, "Bah humbug,"

Sirius' face broke out into a grin again, and his eyes shined with a note of triumph, "That's the spirit," He leant up and pressed his lips softly to Remus', and Remus could feel him smiling against his cheeks. However, as he felt Sirius' hands creep beneath his t-shirt a second time, Remus pulled them away and stood up, backing up towards the door, "No, I only just put it back on,"

Sirius made a noise like a dog that wanted feeding; a long, high pitched whine, standing and moving over to where Remus stood, and began playing with the hem of Remus' sleeve, "But the colours *offend me*, Moons." Remus, despite the tension rising in his chest, resisted the urge to kiss the boy again, and instead smirked, then pulled open his bedroom door,

"I don't care," He began walking out into the hallway, but paused, looking back, "Pancakes."

Sirius' eyebrows shot up, and he followed Remus down the hall with a grin on his features, "Pancakes?"

Remus looked back at him as he pushed open the kitchen door, "Pancakes."

James and Lily were the only other two up, and seemed to be ignoring each other – or, rather, Lily was ignoring James, as she was sat at the table with her back to him, where he stood facing the sideboard, taking fleeting glances every few seconds. He looked up gratefully as he saw the two boys walk in, and smiled his brilliant, whitened smile,

"Morning, lovebirds," There was something of a glint of mischief in his eye, and he gave them a knowing smile, "Have fun last night?" He turned around so that he was leaning a hip against the kitchen cupboards, his cereal bowl in his hands as he ate.

Remus blushed deeply, but Sirius threw an arm around the taller boy's shoulder and laughed, "It was *excellent*."

James dropped his smile and gave them a glare, "I know," Remus' stomach dropped sickeningly, "Pete came into my room at eleven. When I asked him why all he said was 'the walls are very thin.'"

Remus groaned and buried his face in his hands, "Jesus Christ," He muttered, as Sirius stroked his arm affectionately,

"Do not feel shame, Moonbeam," Sirius said, his voice deadly serious but his mannerisms telling a different story, "Shame is for the weak – like Potter, over there. Did you know that last night he asked out this poor, poor girl again?"

Lily turned around and gave Sirius a pointed look, "Would you mind *not* embarrassing me further, Padfoot?" She picked up her empty plate and made her way over to the sink furthest from James and began washing up, "It was bad enough last night."

Remus stepped out from under Sirius' arm, which still hung lazily around his shoulders, and collapsed into one of the dining chairs, "How do you even know what was happening last night?" He directed his question at Sirius, who was now trying to climb up to sit on one of the countertops, if only he wasn't so short.

Sirius shrugged, finally getting a good seat on the sideboard and beginning to swing his legs backwards and forwards so his feet beat out a rhythm on the cupboard doors, "I'm an early riser," He grinned at James suddenly, "And I bumped into Prongs on his way in from his jog."

James was glaring at him, but there was still a note of affection in his eyes, "I didn't tell you so that you could go and blab to everyone else," he placed his cereal bowl down on the sideboard, "which I now realise was a misjudgement."

Lily snorted, allowing a bubble of laughter to escape her lips before composing herself and fixing a scowl on her pretty face. James, who had noticed that his joke had been appreciated, grinned, "You laughed!" He pointed at her, and Remus was suddenly happy that at least when *he* had a crush on someone he was subtle about it.

"I didn't mean to," She countered, taking her plate and glass and placing them carefully back into her cupboard, "Trust me, I would *never* boost your ego intentionally."

Remus laughed as he watched Lily leave the room, but stopped when he saw James visibly deflate.

"What am I going to *do*?" His head was in his hands and his voice was pained. Sirius hopped down from the counter and snaked an arm around James' shoulder,

"My advice would be to give up, mate."

Remus gave a nod of agreement, "I think that's best, to be honest, Prongs." If Remus was really being honest, he probably would have told James to shut up and piss off so he could have pancakes, but he felt like delicacy was needed, especially in the case of trying to repair James' shattered dignity.

But James was looking at them as if they had just called him – or, quite possibly, Lily – something awful, and his face emerged from his hands to glare at them, "Give up?" He sounded like even the prospect was painful, "You think I could *give up* on *Lily*? Have you *seen her*? She's literally the most amazing person I've ever met. I'm in love."

"I'd say you were infatuated, mate," Sirius shrugged, "But then what do I know, eh? It's not as if any of *us* are in a happy, stable relationship, is it?"

James screwed up his face into a mock sneer, "Piss off with your *happiness*," He untangled himself from Sirius' arms as best he could and made his way out of the kitchen, "I'm going to wallow in self-pity, call me if you want to drink."

"It's ten in the morning?" Remus called after him, as James skulked out of the room, as if walking towards the gallows.

"Time is meaningless," He threw back as the kitchen door slammed shut behind him, and Sirius nodded at Remus knowingly.

A silence settled over the two of them for a few moments as each digested the scene that they had just watched unfold, and Sirius slipped his hands into the pockets of his pyjamas, bringing his shoulders up to his ears in an exaggerated shrug, before Remus broke the silence.

“Pancakes?” He smiled at Sirius hopefully, all raised eyebrows and teeth, but Sirius shrugged again,

“I’m feeling bacon now,”

Remus scowled deeply, his grin dropping instantly from his face. Sirius frowned for a second, before his face lit up once more,

“Bacon pancakes?”

Remus pondered this for a few moments, before accepting that this was a satisfactory suggestion and nodding, “Bacon pancakes.”

Durham University’s *University Challenge* team sailed through the second round of the competition with a stylish ease, wiping the floor with the University of Liverpool and beating them with 150 points to 35. Remus had watched safely from the comfort of the audience with Sirius, who had been guessing the most ridiculous answers to the questions with the hope that Remus would laugh loud enough that the presenter would tell him off. Unfortunately, Remus was a lot better at this game than Sirius was, and half an hour into the recording Jeremy Paxman had asked for Sirius to be removed, before he removed him himself.

When Remus found Sirius later on, he was sat, looking rather sorry for himself, on the steps of the BBC building, his knees brought up to his chest and a scowl on his handsome face. Remus broke away from the celebrating team and slipped his hands into his jeans pockets,

“Learnt your lesson yet?” He asked, shouting above the bitter December wind, which whipped his too-long fringe into his face in a way he hoped looked cool, but probably looked stupid. Sirius turned towards him and pouted – over exaggerated, his bottom lip sticking out – and pushed himself up off the ground, brushing the back of his jeans hurriedly in case they’d been dirtied,

“I will never again try to make you laugh, ever.” He said solemnly, nodding his head and struggling to keep his face straight.

“Like hell,” Remus rolled his eyes, then reached out for Sirius’ arm, closing his hand around the boy’s forearm and dragging him down the steps of the building towards the group of students singing merrily in front of them. Sirius pouted for a few moments, but it was only a matter of time before he joined in with the chorus of ‘We are the Champions’ that was now echoing across the square. Remus thought he could never get sick of that song – it was a timeless classic.

How wrong he was.

“Can you guys shut up now?”

An hour and three pints of cider later, Remus had his hands over his ears to block out the sound of Queen, which was now being played over the pub’s jukebox for the sixth time since their arrival. Not that he had anything against Queen – he could still recall dancing around and pretending to be Freddie Mercury in his early teen years – he just wished someone would put on another damn song.

“Silence, Moonface.” Sirius placed a finger on his lips and giggled lightly – Remus had never wished he had filmed something so much before in his life – and slammed his empty pint glass down on the bar between the two of them, swaying violently, “We are the *champions*.”

“We did nothing,” Remus said, sliding the glass away from Sirius to avoid him knocking it over, which was looking more and more likely as he stumbled ever more aggressively, “You’re not even on the team.”

Sirius giggled again, leaning into Remus in a way that was nowhere near as alluring as he probably hoped that it was, “I’m on *one* of the team.”

“Jesus Christ,” Remus sighed, side-stepping away from Sirius and the bar, and slipping into the booth where Kingsley sat with Gilderoy, who was typing on his phone frantically.

“Twitter,” Kingsley nodded towards the blonde, explaining before Remus even had a chance to ask, “He has to keep his fans informed.”

Remus’ brow furrowed, “He has fans?”

Gilderoy looked up from his phone and shot Remus a grin, his teeth almost too big for his face, “Well,” He began, admiring his reflection in the screen of his phone, and Remus had to try very hard not to laugh, “When you look like this it’s hard not to acquire a few thousand followers when you appear on television.” He gave his reflection a cheeky wink, before placing his phone down on the table between them, “Kingsley gained a few as well, last year.”

Kingsley shrugged as if to brush off Lockhart’s comment, but Remus saw him smirk a little.

“SHACK!”

“Oh dear lord,” Remus buried his head in his hands as Sirius practically dived into the seat next to Gilderoy and threw his hands across the table towards Kingsley, grabbing a hold of his forearms and grinning,

“Shack, I love you,”

Kingsley looked around at Remus very slowly, as if to draw out the embarrassment for as long as possible, before arching a single eyebrow and asking in a low voice, “How many has he had?”

Remus shrugged, “He’s a lightweight, honestly,” before taking hold of Sirius’ hands and removing them from Kingsley’s arms, “Sorry.”

Remus expected Sirius to complain, but he seemed quite content in his drunken haze to hold Remus’ hands across the table, grinning stupidly. Remus thought he would have been adorable had he not been so embarrassing, but noted that he was never going to let Sirius get drunk around his friends ever again.

Remus Lupin - 20/12/2015 16:36 – How are things in the Potter-Black household?x

Sirius Black – 20/12/2015 16:39 – Pads has told me to tell you that everything is great but I [James] would like to inform you that we are having to share a toothbrush and I am not okay with this. Also Pads wanted me to send you kisses but gross

Remus Lupin – 20/12/2015 16:40 – Prongs you’re the richest person I’ve ever met can’t you just go and buy him a toothbrush? Also probably a good call on the kisses thing, you wouldn’t want to catch the gay ;) xx (oops watch out they’re coming for you)

Sirius Black – 20/12/2015 16:41 – what’s this about catching the gay?? i think i caught that a

while ago ;) it's me again btw i was just making pancakes so i had to get prongs to type for me i hope he didn't offend u xxx

Remus Lupin – 20/12/2015 16:42 – Pancakes??? It's four in the afternoon??? Xxx

Sirius Black – 20/12/2015 16:42 – *there is never an inappropriate time for pancakes. also in response to the toothbrush thing prongs would like me to tell you that we have not yet been up and dressed at an appropriate toothbrush buying time, and today is, in fact, the first time that we have seen sunlight since university xxxx*

Remus Lupin – 20/12/2015 16:43 – *The shops are open later at Christmas? Xxxx*

Sirius Black – 20/12/2015 16:44 – *we know xxxx*

Remus Lupin – 20/12/2015 16:44 – *Jeez*

James Potter – 22/12/2015 14:54 – *Tell your boyfriend to fuck off for me plz*

Remus Lupin – 22/12/2015 15:02 – *What is he doing? Can't you do it yourself?*

James Potter – 22/12/2015 15:03 – *He won't stop singing Mariah Carey send help*

Remus Lupin – 22/12/2015 15:03 – *RIP u*

James Potter – 22/12/2015 15:04 – *He's moved on to the waitresses now*

Remus Lupin – 22/12/2015 15:05 – *Christmas wrapping is an excellent song tbh I'd probably put up with that*

James Potter – 22/12/2015 15:05 – *I can't wait to send him to you – there's only so many variations of 'God rest ye merry gentlemen' a man can put up with before he's driven to murder*

Remus Lupin – 22/12/2015 15:06 – *plz don't kill him he's too pretty to die*

James Potter – 22/12/2015 15:06 – *He says thank you*

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:36 – *i miss you :(x*

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:37 – *Shh, Santa will hear you x*

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:38 – *maybe he'll spoon me – i need a new buddy seeing as you're 200 miles away x*

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:40 – *That was not a mental image I needed, thanks. I never understood the concept of 'sexy Santa' it's just full on creepy. Gross. x*

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:42 – *is it weird that i'm not even excited for christmas at all?? i just want to see you again :(xx*

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:45 – *Six days. Xx*

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:45 – can't pass soon enough tbh xxx

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:46 – What time do you arrive in Leeds? Need to know so I can embrace you on the platform like we're in a romantic movie xxx

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:47 – half 1 – also im hoping that after this long wait this embrace will be very much non-pg ;) xxx

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:48 – My parents will be there, Pads, it very much will be xxx

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:49 – booooooring remind me again why i date u? i think i hear the sound of reindeer hooves on the roof... g2g pretend to sleep or i wont get any presents ;) ily xxx

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:50 - You date me because I have excellent hair and an extensive record collection. You said so last week. Sleep well, Pads xxxx

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:51 – until tomorrow, moon emoji

Remus Lupin – 24/12/2015 23:51 – Reusing nicknames, are we?

Sirius Black – 24/12/2015 23:52 – these are the greatest hits

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 06:34 - HO HO HO MOTHERFUCKER

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:01 – Is that any way to greet me on the anniversary of our Lord And Saviour's birth?

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:02 – youre quite right i meant to say HAPPY FUCKIN BIRTHDAY JESUS YA FILTHY ANIMAL

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:02 – If we weren't gay I'd say that that text had just landed you with a one way ticket to hell

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:03 - ͡_ (͡_) ͡_

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:03 – whats with all the religious talk m00n b0i?

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:03 – I'm at church RN (+ never call me that again)

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:04 – CHURCH????? how did u not burst into flames as soon as u walked in u filthy sinner?

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:05 – Jeez thanks. But yeah my dad is kinda religious so we go to church on Christmas. I don't like it but [imagine I'm shrugging]

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:05 – Also there's free cake and tea afterwards and I'm always down for free cake

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:06 – my family were religious fanatics lol

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:06 – Doesn't surprise me tbh

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:07 – thats why i got kicked out when i came out haha

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:07 – W H A T

Remus Lupin -25/12/2015 10:07 – you never told me that

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:08 – I'm so so so so so sorry xxxxxxxxxx [that's me kissing you all over your pretty face]

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:08 – calm down moons jeez im fine

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:08 – kisses are v much appreciated tho ;) xxxx

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 10:09 – Argh mum caught me texting so brb gotta go pretend to pray ily xxxxxx

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 10:10 – pray for wednesday to come quicker :(ily2 xxxxxxxxxx

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:36 – Cake is being eaten

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:37 – nice – were having presents rn

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:37 – IDC about your presents I have chocolate cake

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:38 – wait a sec u like chocolate omg i had no idea

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:39 – ur a dick & I h9 u

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:40 – i cant believe ud say that to me on christmas m00n b0i

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:40 – Using the same nickname twice in the space of two hours? Weak.

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:41 – ill try and up my nickname game for u moony

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:41 – I can't wait. Get any good presents?

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:43 – prongs family got me stuff?? like clothes and stuff??? theyre so nice wtf

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:43 – also prongs himself got me a new leather jacket because hes rich af and i only did a painting for him :/ :/ :/

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:44 – DW Pads, its fine seriously they understand that you can't afford to get them stuff. They probably have all the stuff they need anyway don't they?? I heard they have staff at their house in India

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:45 – o yea they do but then we used to have staff at ours so its not that rare tbh

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 11:46 – I wish you still had staff I hate washing up

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 11:46 – *one of the perks of living with a horrifically rich bigoted family was that i hadnt seen a dishcloth until I was 18*

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 14:54 – *wtf Pads this painting is amazing WTF W T F*

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 14:55 – *omfg you opened it do you like it please tell me you do*

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 14:55 – *IT'S AMAZING I LOVE IT SO MUCH YOU'RE AMAZING I WANNA KISS YOUR STUPID FACE NOW PLEASE GET THE NEXT TRAIN TO LEEDS*

Sirius Black – 25/12/2015 14:56 – *maybe ill paint you things more often if thats how you react*

James Potter – 25/12/2015 18:43 – *I'm so sorry*

Remus Lupin – 25/12/2015 18:44 – *What? What's happening?*

[Remus' phone buzzed in his hand, and the screen flashed at him to show that Sirius was calling]

"MOOOOOOOON BOOOOOY"

"Exactly how much sherry have you consumed in the last four hours?"

"NOT ENOUGH"

"I can tell you right now that that is not true."

[*"Who's that, dear?"*]

Remus lowered the phone from his ear, holding it to his Christmas jumper-clad chest and shooting his grandmother an apologetic look,

"My idiot boyfriend."]

"Did you just call me an idiot?"

"What else would I call you? That's what you are, idiot."

"Merry Christmas to you too."

"Look, as much as I would love to chat to you when you're this drunk –"

"You love it, you love me, and you know you do,"

"Shush. Call the Midwife is going to be on soon and if I miss it because of you then I'm afraid I'll have to break up with you."

"You care about that show too much."

"Patsy is my bae."

"Did you just say -?"

“Anyway, bye, Pads! Love you, and all that nonsense.”

“WAIT, MOONY I –”

[Call ended – 18:56]

30/12/2015

Sirius Black – 09:15 – ON MY WAY OMG

Remus Lupin – 10:45 – Jeez how did you even get up so early???????

Sirius Black – 10:45 – the thought of getting a good snog tbh also WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ive had to entertain myself on this train for the last hour and a half

Remus Lupin – 10:46 – I was visiting some good friends in the land of nod

Sirius Black – 10:46 – as usual

Remus Lupin – 10:47 – Did you expect anything else??? I don't get out of bed until at least 10 when I have work to do, now I'm free I'll be in bed til 12 at least

Sirius Black – 10:47 – just make sure youre here to meet me at half 1 xx

Remus Lupin – 10:48 – I wouldn't dare miss it xx

Leeds train station was, as usual, a sea of people. Remus Lupin was, as usual, a nervous wreck.

It wasn't just the thought of introducing Sirius to his parents that terrified him, but the thought of having to stand and wait amongst thousands of people who were all trying to push past each other to the platforms made his skin crawl. His vision was constantly obscured, he couldn't hear anything and people were continuously brushing past him as he stood underneath the arrivals board, watching Sirius' train from London Euston crawl ever closer to the top of the list.

Remus' parents were a little way behind him, sat on uncomfortable metal benches; his father watching the departures tick off one by one, and his mother scribbling ideas down in a notebook. They were both doing a remarkable job of looking like they weren't waiting almost as anxiously as Remus was, and Remus noted that he needed to ask them how they did that as he began rocking backwards and forwards on the balls of his feet.

Finally, Sirius' train disappeared from the arrivals list, which meant that Remus now had no excuse to be staring at it, and should really be looking around for his boyfriend to appear out of the crowd – for some reason it took him a few moments to gather up the courage to do that.

Being over six feet tall, Remus had a decent vantage point above the crowd, but seeing as Sirius was a Tiny Hobbit this didn't give him much of an advantage, and, even as he squinted down at the hordes of commuters, he found himself willing for Sirius to have decided not to come.

However, one brilliant grin from Sirius melted all of those feelings away, and Remus felt his face break into the biggest smile he had ever smiled as the boy jumped into his arms, giving him the world's tightest hug.

“I missed you,” Sirius whispered in his ear, his arms around Remus’ waist tightening, “I made a point to whine about it to Prongs every day – he threatened to kick me out.”

Remus laughed into Sirius’ hair as he buried his face into the crook of the shorter boy’s neck, “I missed you too, Padfoot.”

Sirius finally released him, and Remus took his hand, dragging him back through the crowd to where his parents were sat, his cheeks pink and an exhilarated grin on his face, “This is Sirius,”

Remus’ parents stood up, Lyall brushing his hands on his knees before holding out one for Sirius to shake, introducing himself. Hope pulled Sirius into a hug as Lyall picked up his suitcase,

“It’s so nice of you to come and stay with us for the New Year,” She smiled, holding Sirius at arm’s length as if to get a good look at him. Remus shot Sirius an apologetic look over his mother’s shoulder, before clearing his throat,

“Should we, er, head off, then?”

Hope looked around at her son and nodded once, “Yes, I think that’s best,” she patted Sirius’ arms quickly before letting him go, “it’s lovely to meet you, dear.”

The four headed out of the train station and back to Remus’ parents’ car in silence, only the persistent drone of the wheels on Sirius’ suitcase piercing the cold winter’s air. They bundled into the tiny vehicle, Remus having to sit cross-legged in order to fit in the back with Sirius, who sent him a smug look as if to say *‘being tall isn’t all good now, is it?’* Remus stuck out his tongue in response, which sent Sirius into a fit of giggles it would no doubt take him several minutes to surface from.

Remus’ extended family was visiting for New Years, so naturally his mother was a nervous wreck. Watching her fret, running around the house plumping cushions and dusting already-spotless ornaments, Sirius leaned over to Remus on the morning of New Year’s Eve as they ate toast on the sofa,

“I can see where you get it from now.”

Remus shoved Sirius away from him, laughing. His mother whipped around and glared at the two boys, wispy hairs falling out of her messy bun, “If you two get any crumbs on my sofa after I spent an hour hoovering it I swear, I’ll leave you to the mercy of Great Aunt Pat.”

Sirius shot Remus a worried look, having never encountered Remus’ great aunt Patricia before, and Remus shook his head, “You don’t want to know the kinds of questions she comes out with – last year she asked me if it was the all-boys school that ‘turned me’.”

Sirius had to cover his mouth to stop himself from spraying toast crumbs everywhere, his hands stifling his giggling as Hope Lupin watched him with eyes like a hawk. Sirius placed his plate down on the coffee table in front of them and picked up his mug of coffee, “She sounds great, I can’t wait to meet her.”

Remus quirked an eyebrow, “Haven’t you had enough of bigoted relatives in your time?” picking up his own mug and taking a sip of tea, watching Sirius carefully out of the corner of his eye.

“She sounds more curious than bigoted, to be honest. I mean she didn’t scratch your name off of the family tree or anything, so,” Sirius shrugged, and Remus shared a Look with his mother, who

had been briefed before his arrival on Sirius' awful family, before letting out a shaky laugh,

"Well, we don't all have ours on display in the entrance hall of our mansion..."

This time it was Sirius' turn to shove Remus, who watched in horror as his tea sloshed over the edge of his mug. Hope was there in an instant, swooping in and taking the mug from Remus' clammy hands and dragging him off of the cushions,

"Did it go on the sofa?" She was fretting again, brushing the material with her hand to attempt to find the spillage on the already brown sofa while Sirius sat and giggled.

"No," Remus winced, "Just on my crotch. Just – just scalding hot tea in my lap; excellent." He grit his teeth and tried his very best to not swear in front of his mother, "Amazing, yes, brilliant."

Sirius continued laughing, "You okay there, babe?"

Remus blinked back tears, and when he spoke it was an octave higher than usual, "Yep, fine, thanks."

"So, does it work like a *normal* relationship?"

Remus mentally cursed the single spot of tea that had missed his crotch and hit the sofa cushions as he grimaced a smile, watching his Great Auntie Pat shovel cheese and biscuits off of a paper plate and into her mouth as she waited expectantly for an answer to her question. He shared a glance with Sirius, who raised his eyebrows as if to say '*you weren't kidding*'.

Remus inclined his head, '*go on, you answer her*'.

Sirius furrowed his brow, '*she's your aunt*'.

Remus let out a deep sigh, '*fine*', and turned back to the old lady, who was now unwrapping a mince pie but still watched him with a look of expectation.

"Yes, Auntie Pat, because we *are* 'normal'." Remus was beginning to regret letting Sirius choose the seat closest to the table, which was set out like a buffet, despite the fact that Remus had *told him* that's where Auntie Pat liked to sit. Sirius had insisted it would be fun, but after a half hour interrogation both could think of nothing better than escaping her grasp.

"Remus!"

The boy in question turned his head, feeling a wave of relief wash over him as he saw one of his cousins approaching them. He stood up, grabbing Sirius by his elbow and pulling him to his feet too, who tutted and snatched three more sausage rolls for his paper plate before following Remus to where his cousin had been sat on the carpet a while before.

"You know you didn't have to move, I would have sat with Great Auntie Pat," The girl said, shooting Remus a jokey look, and they both laughed, "So, are you going to introduce me to your boyfriend?" Remus could tell that by that she meant could Remus introduce his boyfriend to *her*, but he felt it best not to comment.

"Uh, yeah," He nudged Sirius with his elbow, "Sirius, this is Lou;" He gestured to the girl, who nodded in greeting, "Lou, this is Sirius," He gave her a stern look, "*please* don't flirt with him."

She looked aghast, and threw a bread roll at Remus' head, "I would never!" Remus simply raised his eyebrows, and she averted her gaze, "Okay maybe I would."

Sirius barked a laugh and plunged into conversation, but Remus was pulled out by his phone buzzing against his thigh.

Gilderoy Lockhart – 31/12/2015 21:08 – Kingsley can't make the next recording – exam – you're on the team, congrats!

"Pads," Remus' hands were shaking. He patted Sirius on the shoulder repeatedly until he turned around, mid-laugh, and his grin dropped.

"Moons, are you okay?"

Remus couldn't speak. His stomach was churning.

"Remus?" He felt Lou's hand on his back, "I'll go and fetch Hope."

Sirius peeled Remus' phone from his grip and squinted at the screen, his jaw dropping open, before looking back up at Remus, a look of wonder on his face, "But this is great!"

"I think I'm going to vomit."

"You're going to be on TV!"

"Seriously, Pads. Me. Vomit. Your jacket."

Sirius frowned at him, "I'm just trying to look on the bright side."

"*Sirius*, shut up." Remus kicked him. He felt cold, despite his oversized Christmas jumper, and couldn't move, rooted to that one spot on the carpet, the needles of the Christmas tree poking against his back. Sirius just watched him, putting the phone screen-down on the carpet, shuffling backwards slightly to give Remus more room, which he appreciated.

Hope rushed in from the kitchen and squatted in front of her son, taking his face in her hands in a way that made Remus' head scream. He pulled back, screwing up his eyes and shaking his head.

"Mrs Lupin," Sirius placed a hand on her shoulder, and she turned to look at him, "We should leave him alone for a while, I think."

Hope searched Sirius' face with glassy eyes for a few seconds before nodding and straightening up, "Yes," She muttered to herself, "I'll make some tea."

Sirius got up and followed her, and Remus could see him murmuring to her, probably talking about him and how pathetic he was. His stomach was aching with worry. He was *on the team*. The *actual team*.

God help him.

"Okay, five minutes everyone!"

Remus had managed to stumble his way through a morning of rehearsals, answering the minimal amount of questions and going pale whenever he hit the buzzer, but he had *made it*. And here he was; sat at the end of the desk with his name in lights in front of him, and an audience staring right

at him. Suddenly his best jumper didn't feel quite smart enough.

"Gilderoy, I can't do this," He muttered to the man next to him, who looked impeccable in a navy blazer and powder blue button-down, "I'm going to fuck it up for everyone."

Gilderoy sighed, having heard this five times that day already, "Remus, if I honestly believed that I would have picked Amos."

"But Lucius said first years never make the team," Remus fretted, "That must be for a reason!"

Gilderoy turned his head, obviously glaring at Lucius, who sent a false smile back, "Lucius doesn't know what he's talking about. You're our best reserve, you'll do fine, or whatever." Left without his phone to mess about with, Remus noted that Gilderoy was now tapping his index finger repeatedly on the desk in front of him as if impatient. Remus gulped.

He looked out to the audience, where he could see Sirius, Peter, James and, surprisingly, Lily sat in a row, chatting excitedly. James and Lily were sat suspiciously close, and – *no, she couldn't have been* – had she been smiling at James? Remus shook his head; clearly the stress was causing him to hallucinate.

The introductions went well – Remus managed to say his name and what he was reading without his tongue falling out, which was good, he supposed – and Jeremy Paxman hadn't made fun of him yet, which was what he had been having nightmares about.

"Your first starter for ten; the Light Programme was the forerunner of which BBC radio channel, to which it changed its name on September 30, 1967?" The presenter had barely read it out before someone pressed the buzzer,

"*Durham, Lockhart,*" The voiceover said, and all eyes turned to Gilderoy, who smirked,

"Radio 2."

There were a few moments of silence that must have seemed longer to Remus than anyone else, before Paxman slapped his question card down on his desk,

"Correct. Your bonus questions are on post-Soviet States..."

It took a few starter questions before there were any that Remus even had an idea of an answer to, and he felt more like he was observing the game than actually participating. He slid his hand back from where it had lain by the buzzer, resigning himself to the backseat for the episode, hoping against hope that it wouldn't look obvious that he had given up when his mother watched it in a few months.

"Durham, your bonus questions are on opening lines of novels,"

Gilderoy elbowed Remus sharply in the ribs and he almost jumped out of his skin, allowing a ripple of laughter from the audience. His stomach twisted; they'd expect something from him now. He had to deliver. He had read a lot of novels, that was true, but there were also a lot of books in the world he'd never even *heard of*.

"Which novel, first published in serial form from 1914 to 1915, begins "Once upon a time and a very good time it was..."?"

Something lit up in Remus' brain. He knew this. He knew it! Didn't he? What was it then?

“That’s Joyce,” Gilderoy whispered to him, “Do you know which one, though?”

“It’s one with a ridiculously long title, I remember that,” Remus chewed on his lip.

“Let’s have it, please,” The presenter said, his voice sharp. Remus panicked.

“Nominate Lupin,” Gilderoy leant towards the microphone slightly, before staring at Remus, who blinked.

“Uh, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man?” He sputtered.

“Can I have an author, please?”

“Joyce, James Joyce!” Remus’ voice was squeaky, and he could feel his cheeks burning bright red. His eyes flicked in Sirius’ direction, and he saw him give him the thumbs up. Remus’ stomach settled a little.

“Correct. “It was a dark and stormy night”” are the first words of the 1830 novel *Paul Clifford* by which writer, whose other works include *Eugene Aram* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*?”

Gilderoy looked to Remus again, who held up his hands and shook his head, “No clue, sorry.”

Gilderoy sighed, making Remus’ stomach twist again, “Pass,”

“Edward Bulwer-Lytton” The presenter, put down another question card, “The novels *Midnight’s Children*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tristram Shandy* all open with which word?”

Remus had read *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in the summer before university, and furrowed his brow trying to remember the first word. His eyes searched for Sirius again, who was watching him with a concerned look. Remus considered for a moment that he might look as bad as he felt, and reached up to wipe sweat from the back of his neck. Yes, wearing a jumper had been a mistake.

“I think, uh, I think the answer is ‘I’,” Remus muttered to Gilderoy, who nodded, before turning to consult Trelawney. No one else seemed to have a better idea, and Gilderoy gave Remus’ answer and received another five points for the team, before clapping Remus on the shoulder to congratulate him.

Remus managed to answer five more questions before the gong rang to signal that time was up. He had completely lost track of the scores and was surprised to find that Durham had beaten Lancaster University 140 to 135. Sirius was sure to assure him that it had been *his* five points that had won the quiz for them, which helped Remus feel a little less emotionally exhausted as they walked out of the building and into the dark, January air. As Sirius laughed his breath condensed in wisps in front of him, and he grinned up at Remus with so much pride in his eyes that Remus felt like he might just cry.

“You won, Moony,” They stopped, letting the rest of the team and the supporters head off to the usual pub without them, “I can’t believe it!”

Remus quirked an eyebrow, taking Sirius’ hand in his own gloved fingers, “Are you saying you didn’t expect it?” He grinned, “You’re so rude.”

Sirius’ features were painted orange under the glow of the streetlamps, splashes of blue and green flashing on and off with the Christmas lights that hung above them, “You know you love it,” He winked. Remus’ expression softened,

“You know what, I actually do,” His gaze dropped to the hand in his own, a pink hue appearing in his cheeks, “I love you, Pads.”

Remus heard a sharp intake of breath, and shut his eyes, cringing.

“Sorry, I – I shouldn’t have said that,” He dropped Sirius’ hand and buried his face in his gloves, “It’s too soon, I know, I’m so embarrassing.”

His hands were pulled away from his face by Sirius, who was smiling up at him, “Shut up, Moony,” He rocked forwards onto his tiptoes and pressed a quick kiss to Remus’ lips, “I love you too.”

And then, like the snowflakes that began to settle on the pavement around them, they melted together, and suddenly *University Challenge* was just a stupid TV show, and Sirius was the only thing in the whole world that mattered.

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